

THE LIBERATING MARRIAGE: THE LIBERATING
RELATIONSHIP OF THE SERMONS AND
SONGS OF THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN CHURCH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. Ministry Focus.....	6
2. The State of the Art in this Ministry Model.....	16
3. Theoretical Foundation.....	29
4. Methodology.....	88
5. Results of the Model.....	91
6. Reflection, Summary and Conclusion.....	95
Appendix	
A. Songs of The Liberating Marriage.....	98
B. Sermons of the Liberating Marriage.....	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	130

ABSTRACT

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The Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church is located in Memphis, Tennessee. This ministry model provides a greater understanding of the relationship between sermons and songs and from that relationship lead to a deeper sense of liberation and hope. This hypothesis was tested through a pre and post test survey to measure attitudinal changes, five services where sermon and song flowed together as well as through discussion groups. The result was that through the marriage of sermons and songs the parishioners experienced the liberation of the Gospel.

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I would like to thank God for Grace and Mercy!!

Thanks to my late father and my mother for the legacy and continued love respectively that was a driving force of this paper.

I thank my partner in life, labor, love, marriage and ministry Nicole Dannielle and the two beautiful daughters she has given me, Trinity Essence and Taylor Emani. Only you know the sacrifice.

Thanks to my Professional Associates Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Dr. Ozzie Smith and Dr. Frank Thomas and my Context Associates Pastor Nadine Burton, Dr. Leo Davis, Minister Richard Edwards and Mrs. Diane Mays.

I'd like to thank the churches I have served: Mission of Faith Baptist (Chicago, IL.); New Faith Baptist (Matteson, IL.) and Mississippi Boulevard Christian (Memphis, TN.) for their love and patience.

Finally thank you to all of my mentors in preaching and music especially Dr(s). Frank Thomas, Jeremiah Wright, Leo Davis and Minister(s) Stirling Culp and Lonnie Hunter III. I am forever indebt to you.

Special thanks to Pastor Tyrone Crider, Bishop Timothy Clark, Precious and Phyllis Luster, and Vic and Talese Dickson without your special gifts this project would not have been possible.

May God bless you all, richly!!!

DEDICATION

To Mom, Nikki, Trinity and Taylor; my past, my present and my future, I love
you!!!

INTRODUCTION

“I believe that God is not only Omnipotent and Omnipresent, but I also that God is Omni-sneaky.” This statement was shared with me recently while having breakfast with Kevin Cosby, Senior Pastor of the Greater St. Stephen Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He used this statement to simply describe the way that God will sometimes move in ways that are both unseen and unbelievable. As I glance back over my ministerial experience I find this statement to be the case. God has been using all of my life’s experiences and gifts to mold a minister that would be effective in the unique urban Middle-class African-American church context of which the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church of Memphis, Tennessee, is a part.

When I was fifteen years old my older cousin gave me and a few other young people from the church a wine cooler. My father who was our pastor found out and punished us by making us write a report on the dangers of alcoholism. He further sent me to talk with a young area pastor named Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas. Thomas was the pastor of a small group of people called New Faith Baptist Church and he unlike my father was young enough to talk objectively to me. He never judged me; however, he through his presentation allowed me to see the error of my ways for myself. During this time I was involved with the high school chorus and my teacher Mr. Stirling Culp was also the Minister of Music at New Faith. Because of my relationship with Mr. Culp I was able to do a music internship at New Faith and eventually become the Minister of Music at my father’s church. After the death of my father in March of 1998, Dr. Thomas and

Mr. Culp offered me the position of full-time Minister of Music at New Faith Baptist Church, in Matteson, Illinois.

The culture shock of leaving the inner-city church experience and planting oneself in the midst of a suburban church context is substantial. The ethos most times is totally different even though the same God is being worshiped. The tenor of an inner-city church is more closely related to the mindset of the historical African-American church. The Black church with God as its father, Africa as its mother the menacing middle passage as its womb and slavery as its delivery room has always conveyed the message of hope. This, though it is the underlying constant in both the inner city and the suburban African-American church, is more predominant in the inner-city context. The church in the inner city is very faith centered. The parishioners believe that “the Lord will make a way somehow.” Urban congregations are faced with the social issues and ills that have plagued our people for hundreds of years. Financial and educational disparity coupled with an ever-widening black hole of death and destruction caused by drugs and violence have seemingly shackled and corralled our people into the paralyzing mindset of indifference. But there is a ray of hope for the inner city. A sunshine of promise amidst the overcast backdrop of stagnation; the light at the end of the tunnel is a God of liberation and the vehicle of worship is the church. The need for hope in the inner city can only be satisfied through the liberating marriage of sermon and song in the historic African-American church.

At the same eleven o'clock hour on Sunday mornings in the suburban church things are quite different. It is a worship experience that is more fact-based than faith-based. Congregants thank God for what has already been done, concerning them, through

movement and deed. There seemingly is not much room for a “what God can do mindset;” it is more focused on “what God has done.” The suburban church really does not directly experience the social ills and issues that plague the inner city, yet it indirectly experiences it due to family members whom are yet in the inner city. There is a need for the suburban congregant to experience the liberation of God in the context of worship in God’s house. Often times in order to experience what Dr. Frank Thomas calls “a fresh dose of hope,” they will return to the inner city church in which they grew up, only still to find that this experience is not satisfying.

These suburban congregants drive through the “hood” to the church and back through the “hood” back home while not really making an investment in the “hood.” As Dr. Marvin McMickle suggests in his book, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class*, middle class African-Americans have many things with which they must contend. They even oft times battle feeling guilty about their own success as well as the realization that even though they are “successful” they are still Black. There needs to be some hope given unto them. There must be a sermon and a song that can give hope to the middle-class African-American.

Coming from an inner city church and then being called to a suburban context, I believe that both needs are felt and important; however I am convinced that they are not isolated. It is my contention that the felt need of the inner city as well as the middle class African-American churches is correlated. I suggest that the Liberating Marriage of Sermon and Song will link the inner city congregation with its suburban counterpart and thus resurrect the position of power and prestige of the historic African-American church. There should be a worship vehicle that includes preaching and singing that causes

awareness and worth among the inner city congregants while moving the middle class members to social outreach. I have been praying for the opportunity to test this hypothesis and God has answer my prayers.

Recently I was approached by the Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas to become a staff member of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, which he now pastors. He and the leadership team created the position of Associate Pastor of Social Outreach and Men's Ministry and asked me to serve. I accepted and am currently ready to test my belief. Mississippi Boulevard is located in an area of Memphis called Midtown. Though Midtown has the locus and personality of the inner city urban community the church is filled with upwardly mobile African-Americans. Plagued by countless societal ills such as poverty, substance abuse, lack of education, unemployment, underemployment and drug-related crime, Midtown is in need of the liberating hope that is found in the sermons and songs of the historic Black church. This is the problem that this project will address.

The hypothesis of the investigating student acknowledges the role of liberation theology in the sermons and songs of the traditional Black church and furthermore suggests that the lack of this theology in the upwardly mobile Black congregants has resulted in a disparity of hope in the African American community. The student asserts that there is a way to invite and inspire the faith community to enjoy the assurance of God's grace through liberating worship. This is through the preaching and singing sermons and songs of liberation theology that move from grace to grace. Tenets of the African village such as self-sufficiency, social awareness and the sustaining of others are

possible when sung and sermonized. This worship is central in hope and builds hope in any and every community.

Methodologically to test this hypothesis six services will be conducted around the theme of the hope and liberating power of the gospel of Christ. The musical selections of the service as well as the sermons will focus on the theme of liberation. The liberating hope of Christ should be seen through both the sermon and song as one movement. Selected members of the church and community will be asked to complete a survey before and after the services given by the Context Associates. The surveys will be the tools used to evaluate the project for strengths and weakness. After evaluation the hope is that both the minister and the musicians will be intentional in the inclusion of hope giving content in their sermons and songs. There will be quarterly surveys instituted to monitor this process on a consistent basis. The objective is that through the liberating marriage of sermon and song the worshiper will be assured of the power of God's grace.

The projected result is that, through the liberating songs and sermons, the 6,500 members of Mississippi Boulevard will recognize the move of God's grace in their lives and inspire them to be intentionally gracious and bless others. This is what creates community; this is what creates hope.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The Beginning of the Story

And then he said it! To that time it was the most life-changing event I had ever experienced, next to the birth of my first daughter, Trinity Essence. It was the second Sunday of September 1997 and I was scheduled to preach my trial sermon. The church was packed, for this long awaited debut of the pastor's son behind the pulpit. You see, my father was the founder/organizer of our church and been leading the flock, of now five hundred, for twenty years. The choir, which was under my tutelage, had just sung and the pastor, my father, rose out of his seat to give remarks and introduce the speaker.

Pastor gave his normal official weekly greetings however; the feeling in the building was peculiar. Amidst this strange atmosphere, he spoke very highly of this first-time speaker and listed a litany of his accomplishments; these were things that he had never mentioned before. He spoke with power and authority of his belief that this preacher was a child of God and predestined by God to do major ministry. And that's when he said it; "Ladies and Gentlemen, the next speaking voice you will hear, after our choir has sung to us the songs of Zion, will be and I don't believe the Lord would mind if I used His words at the Jordan River, when he introduced His Son, this is my son in whom I am well pleased, come on and give God some praise for Eugene Gibson, Jr." I began to cry and continued to do so through the entire song. I was excited to preach but

even if I did not preach it was all right with me. I could not believe that he said that. I mean, I was twenty-six years old and finally I was good enough.

Formative Years

Though compared to the testimony of some, my life might seem to be easy; however, what I have experienced has indeed been forged through tears and hurt. My father was a pastor and had been for about a year when I was born. He, to me, was my representative of God. I used to have a rough time when he would get upset with me because I felt that God was upset with me. My mother did not work after I was born and did not get her first job until I was twenty.

My father believed and trusted the Lord probably more than any other person I have seen in my life. Dad taught us the ways of the Lord in both the church and at home. Because of this I came into the knowledge of Christ, accepted Him as my Savior and was baptized at an early age. I really believed in God and though I was young, it was my desire to live for Him. My father was very traditional in his approach to life and since he brought the money home, he basically ran things.

At the same time he was dedicated to not letting us go without and set on being a great father to us. This was probably due to my grandfather not providing for my dad and his brother, as well as his mother dying when he was five. Dad was raised by his grandparents Elder Julius and Missionary Cora Gibson in the Church of the Living God in both Detroit and Chicago.

Due to our church being young, dad was not at home a lot of the time. There would be times that we would see him on Sunday night, but not talk to him again until Friday. He was not there for us because he was helping other people, but there was no one there to help us. What was beginning to be hard was that when we did see dad, our representative of God, nothing was quite right. He would only give us just enough in the way of the positive, before we would hear that dreaded conjunction, “but.” It seemed as if nothing was ever good enough for him.

My mother being his support system would encourage us and tell us that our daddy did love us even though he had to be at church. When we came home from school she was there. She loved us even through her loneliness. We never knew or maybe even had the capacity to understand the sacrifice that she was making for us. It seemed as if all she wanted to do in life was to make a happy home. That's exactly what she did. She gave us the needed positive reinforcement and told us that what we did was the best in the world. She would also make sure that we would learn our Sunday school lesson and not be an embarrassment to the “first” family. This was the beginning of the tough part.

There is nothing worse in the life of a young person than being different; one does not want to stick out. Fitting in is the thing that the majority of young people want to do and my sister Genia and myself were no different; yet in church we were treated differently. After all, our father was the pastor and we were in the first family. There is a list of unfair and unwritten expectations for preacher's kids that are in stark contrast to those that are expected of normal kids. Unfortunately, Genia and I lived under those expectations. With normal kids the attitude was “kids will be kids.” With preachers kids the attitude was “you two ought to know better.” Our actions were always a reflection on

the larger family. We have two older brothers; however, they did not live with us and they were not subject to the same governing principles.

As we tried to fit in with the other kids at church, they began to recognize how different we were and would even ask little questions. “How come you get to sit at that table with the grown-ups?” “It’s my father’s anniversary” was neither an acceptable or understandable answer for them. In fact we did not even understand it. The grown-ups were no different; if I was doing something wrong with a group of young people, the adult(s) would advise the other kids of their error, yet they would tell me that I knew better and that they were going to tell my father. My father being traditionalized or “old school” felt it only right to make an example out of us.

On one occasion I was in choir rehearsal flirting and talking with a young lady while the president was talking. I was reprimanded by a male choir member, who was also a deacon. I recognized my wrong, said I was sorry but when I looked back toward the girl she started sheepishly laughing. I kind of shrugged my shoulders and the deacon exclaimed, “I heard that, I will not be disrespected like that!” I had said nothing. The next day as my mother was about to drive us to a skating party, my dad called from the church to tell me that I could not go, because I had disrespected that deacon. That man had lied on me yet my father, in order to make an “old school” example out of me, once again put the concerns of members over the concerns of the family.

We were normal at school however socially again somehow we were different. My mother was at home while most of the other kids were what were called “latch-key” kids. I did not realize that this was a blessing; I thought that my mother was there to mess up our fun. But the fact that I did not associate with the other kids during after school

unchaperoned sessions and that I was known for going to church quickly earned me the name “church boy.” I hated that name because, though it represented everything that I was and that God would eventually call me to be, it was far from normal. More than that, it prevented me from being accepted.

Point of Departure

Upon my graduation from high school things were going pretty well. I graduated with honors and I had finally hooked up with the skating party girl. I thought that things looked good; until I found out that the school that I had dreamed of attending all of my life, Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, accepted me. I was rejoicing like never before and then my father broke the news to me, that we could not afford it.

I settled for Illinois State University, which turned out to be paradoxically the best and worst year of my life. During this time, I was on my own for the first time in my life. The good part was that I was able to finally crawl from under the rules of my parent's house and was enjoying the process of thinking for myself. I began to study other religions because I wanted know if I was Christian because my parents told me to believe or because I truly believed.

The freedom to think was wonderful; however, the down side was that I began to do all the things that “church boys” were not suppose to do. I began to fit in and be accepted. I quickly learned that alcohol was pleasing to my palate. I also learned how much I liked women and how much more they liked me.

Needless to say I flunked out of school and my father, basically knowing why, informed me that I was on my own. Knowing that this was almost inevitable I had already auditioned at a music school in Chicago. I was accepted on a vocal scholarship but quit after two years. My parents were both disappointed with me but my father was down right livid. He told me one morning after I had been out late partying, that if I did not get it together within a week that he was going to put me out. Even though I had many girlfriends there was this new sister named Nicole, in my life that I really liked. She was beginning to occupy most of my time not because she demanded it, but because I wanted to give it to her.

So when my father gave me this threat, that had been one of many, I all but totally disregarded it. Before the week was up, however, he went into my room and found a few empty beer bottles and when I returned home, my beds were in the garage and my clothes were in garbage bags. He told me I had twenty minutes to use his phone and find a place to stay but after that, I had to leave.

Fortunately, my aunt said that I could live with her for a few days. I slid into a deep depression and a few days turned into 8 months of me doing nothing. One thing that was good during that time was the relationship that I developed with my brother who lived down the street from my aunt. During one of my visits to his home he told me that he was homosexual. He talked of how it hurt him that there was no room in dad's heart for him because of his sexuality. He thought this was too narrow for dad. He also informed me that he was HIV positive and how his medicine was too expensive. He was a Broadway performer; however, he hadn't had a show in a while; if only I had been in a better position to help him. But that was nearly impossible. Though I was losing my

mind, God was working it out for me. You see, I called a friend of mine on the West Side of Chicago who was a drug dealer and told him that I would sell drugs for him. He simply asked me how much money I needed. I told him about \$500 to \$1000 dollars. He told me that he would give me the money but he would not let me sell any drugs. He said, "You can't do this cause you a church boy."

I still could not make a commitment to help my brother, after all the only income that I had was from the church, where I was now the part-time minister of music. This was acceptable financially for me but not enough to help him. There was something missing. Even though I would get up, sing and seemingly aid in the "breakthrough" of others, I was empty. I needed something that would make me feel I had a sense of worth.

I mean, I could still have called any one of the female friends but there was only one that I wanted to be with, Nicole. She would call and come by my aunt's house to see about me. But after nine months, she got tired of me destroying myself and softly said, "I love you, but you have to do better or I will have to leave you alone." That statement changed my life. Because I realized that she accepted me at my lowest just like Jesus had. That was now ten years ago and I love her even more now for it. Often I have said that Jesus saved my soul but my wife saved my life.

For fear of losing her, I got my life together for the most part. However, after we were married the financial situation and our future looked bleak. I had dropped out of two schools and I couldn't afford to go to another one. I began working at a gas station but I knew this was not my calling. Though, during a heated disagreement with my father, I had quit my job as minister of music, my father began to give me more respect because he saw me trying. He even apologized and offered me my old job back; I accepted.

Compared to how my circumstances had been, the situation was looking up; however there was still something missing.

The Prodigal Returns

In the latter part of January 1997, I began to feel uneasiness in my spirit. I thought I was sick and went to the doctor, but he released me with a clean bill of health. I began to sense that this was “a God thing.”

Because I had been feeling this tugging at my heart and thought it to be God, I determined that I would seek Him to make sure it was Him. The second Saturday of February 1997, was the day that I designated that God was going to show up or He was not God. I went into our room and began to pray aloud. I asked God to lift the heaviness in my spirit and told Him that if He wanted me to preach, then He would have to call me, that day. I asked Him for a sign.

I prayed for two and a half hours and nothing happened. I began to cry and pray louder because I was upset. Nothing happened. I was ready to give up and about the middle of the third hour something happened. I put the Bible down at the foot of my bed, where I had been kneeling for three and a half hours, after I had randomly opened it to Matthew and seen nothing. I left it lying there opened and I crawled onto the bed, wet from sweating and crying and rested my back against the headboard. As I pondered on the happenings of the last few hours, I noticed the title of a book on my shelf that was adjacent to the bed. The name of the book was *Islam, Freemasonry and Christianity*. I

picked up the book and opened it. As I began to read, I heard the pages of the Bible began to turn. I cannot report that I saw them, but I did hear them.

I was not scared but curious. Could this be God? If it is, it is about time that He showed up. I picked up the Bible and quickly noticed that it was no longer in Matthew but in Galatians. Then these words jumped off of the page, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel." I closed the Bible and began to thank God for showing up; but now I needed to know if he was calling me to preach. I prayed to God and informed Him that I did not want to preach. I did not want to preach, because my father was a preacher; however, if he truly was calling me then I would. He confirmed it through three scriptures in the same visual way. As I again randomly opened the Bible, God said three things, "God has not given us the spirit of fear; Stir up the gift that is in you; and Preach the word...be instant in and out of season."

The next morning, I went to church and told my father the whole story. He took his handkerchief and wiped the tears from his eyes and said, "I knew." Eight months later, as mentioned before, the church was packed to hear my trial sermon.

Early the next year, after only having preached three sermons, I received a call from my father, he told me that he just been informed by the doctor that he probably would not be out of the hospital by the weekend. He went on to say that he needed me to preach for the outing on Sunday evening.

I preached a sermon called "Authorized Personnel Only"; that was my fourth sermon, my dad died three weeks later. March 10, 1998, the day dad died, was the day that changed my life forever. That night, I was elected by all of the other associates who

just one month earlier protested the pastor's decision to have me preach in his stead, to preach that Sunday to the wounded congregation. That Sunday I preached from the Psalm text, "How can we sing Zion's song in a strange land?" I called it "Neighbor Go Get Your Harp!" Later that evening, 3,500 people attended my father's funeral. Though I submitted a resume and was interviewed by the church, I was killed by the politics. Once again, I felt that I was not good enough.

God eventually gave me release from that congregation and allowed me to be hired as a full-time minister of music at a church almost ten times the size. The church was New Faith Baptist Church and I was to serve under the tutelage of Rev. Dr. Frank Anthony Thomas.

In August of that same year, my brother, Everett died of AIDS. His mother asked me to preach his funeral and I did. Though it was the toughest thing I ever had to do, God's grace was once again sufficient.

That was five years ago. Since then, my wife and I had a second daughter, Taylor Emani, and God has continued to bless in many ways. He has assured me that if He "be for me," it was worth more than if the whole world was against me. I began to walk in that assurance in December of 2001.

Two months later, I was offered an opportunity to serve as the Associate Pastor of Men and Outreach at the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, Tennessee once again under the tutelage of my mentor, Dr. Frank Anthony Thomas. I have been here a year now and I am still excited because I believe that the best is yet to come.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The African American Heritage Hymnal¹

Using the words of Wyatt Walker in the introduction of this masterpiece it is “probably the most important addition to Protestant hymnody in the past century.” The Hymnal is the combination of both “burning and learning.” It uses research to give honor not only to the scholarly traditions embraced by the A.M.E. Church under the leadership of Bishops Richard Allen and Daniel Alexander Payne, but it also honors the richness of the spirit-filled tradition of the Church of God in Christ under the leadership of Bishop Charles Mason and every tradition in between. The Hymnal includes essays from various scholars in the historic African American church as well as responsive readings, litanies, liturgical worship guides and one of the most impressive collections of African American folk songs, spirituals and gospel songs. In the “Liberating Marriage” this hymnal played a major role. It was in and of itself a reservoir of research and the investigating student was able to see clearly how the songs of the African American church have liberated Black people.

Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry²

Never having been exposed to the term prior to reading this literary offering by J. Deotis Roberts, the investigating student is convinced that Africentrism is the driving

¹ Robert J. Batastini, ed. *African American Hymnal* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001).

² J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000).

force of any true historically African American Church. The African American church has always been a hybrid of the best of African culture and the liberation tenets of Christian theology and Roberts has masterfully interwoven them in his argument. By offering an almost exhaustive look at various topics from Theology to Hermeneutics to Preaching and Social Witness, he presents the reader with a well-rounded view concerning the necessity of this centuries-old worldview. *Africentric Christianity* bears strong witness to the preservation of a view that the researching student argues in *The Liberating Marriage* was the view of the historic Black church. Roberts is quoted throughout the project.

*Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*³

With the exception of the Holy Writ itself this collection edited by Milton C. Sernett is the most powerful book with which the researcher has ever come into contact. Loaded with first source information this book has eavesdropped in on the interviews and writings those who are both giants of both history and the church. This book made available to the researcher the emotion felt by Nat Turner and Fredrick Douglass as well as the brilliance of Carter G. Woodson, Benjamin Mays and W.E.B. Du Bois. These authors along with the illumination it brought to the radicalism of Marcus Garvey and the teachings of Father Divine served as a historical and social backdrop to *The Liberating Marriage*. *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* transported the researcher back to the days when the witnesses were documented.

³ Milton C. Sernett, ed. *Afro-American Religious History A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985).

*Before the Mayflower*⁴

This epic work of the History of Black America by Lerone Bennett, Jr. is both timely and timeless. The power of Bennett's research as well as the profundity of his choice of words will resonate even for years to come. Now in its at least sixth edition *Before the Mayflower* chronicles the sojourn of black people from the glory of the Africa to the glory of America and the sun that constantly shone on their darkened skin. The impact of this book on *The Liberating Marriage* was astounding in that it provided the historical link between Africa and America. All of the other historical sources used were used as a complimentary source to this book.

*Between God and Gangsta Rap*⁵

Noted preacher, scholar and educator Michael Eric Dyson investigates the hip-hop culture of Blacks today and places it somewhere "between God and gangsta rap." Eloquence and poetic prose generically describe Dyson's masterful use of both language and wit as he presents his case that contains a plethora of names from Malcolm X to Public Enemy's hype man Flavor Flav. This book however did not help the efforts of the researcher in the manner in which the student thought it might. The argument that was to be proposed in *The Liberating Marriage* was that preaching and singing are not only married historically but they are married and become one in rap music. *Between God and*

⁴ Lerone Bennet, Jr., *Before the Mayflower* 5th ed. (New York: Penguin Books).

⁵ Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap* (New York: Oxford Press, 1997).

Gangsta Rap though calling Public Enemy “Rap’s Prophets of Rage” did not address the areas that the researcher needed.

***The Black Church in the African American Experience*⁶**

The name C. Eric Lincoln is synonymous with excellence in scholarship relating to the subject, the history of the black church. In this offering he teams up with Lawrence Mamiya and produces the preeminent manual of black church history in print today. Flowing from subject to subject this dynamic duo leaves no stone unturned. They investigate the major Black denominations (Methodists, Baptists and Pentecostals) as well as walk the reader through an overview of the historic African-American church, including preaching and music. This book, more than any other, has had an impact on *The Liberating Marriage*. Lincoln and Mamiya’s expertise is unwavering from page to page and provided the source material and informed insight into the history of the church. This book is quoted quite often in the final document.

***The Black Experience in Religion*⁷**

This collection of readings edited by C. Eric Lincoln has for years been viewed as a major event in the history of African American church scholarship. Traditionally known for its oral preservation of the history of the African American church is

⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the American Experience* (North Carolina Duke University Press, 1987).

⁷ C. Eric Lincoln ed. *The Black Experience in Religion* (Garden City, NY: Achor Press, 1974).

religious scholarship grace the pages of this book with their expertise as well as their emotional connection to the subject matter. *The Liberating Marriage* was indeed influenced by many of the entries into this book, especially the work of Eileen Southern that is both reviewed later and quoted extensively in the project.

*Breaking Down Barriers*⁸

“Without the Black Church there would be no Black People.” This was the statement that the author, Dwight D. Perry began the class in which he first taught this book *Breaking Down Barriers*. The investigating student was a member of that class and therefore has a high view of this book. Being an African American Evangelical, Perry takes a strong stand in order to bring validity to the scribing of the emotive history indicative of the African American while remaining uncompromising to the level scholarship to which subscribes. This book can claim to be the origin of *The Liberating Marriage*. It was in Dr. Perry’s class and through this book that the researcher first fell in love with the history of the Black church. It was the student’s challenge to write. Dr. Perry’s work is both seen and unseen in *The Liberating Marriage*.

⁸ Dwight Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998).

*Introducing Black Theology*⁹

Ironically, like Dr. Perry the writer of this book, Dr. Bruce Fields was also a teacher of the investigating student. However *Introducing Black Theology* had yet to be published. Dr. Fields, an evangelical investigates and argues for and against the valid and invalid points of Black Theology. He reports the indictments against Black Theology held by many evangelicals as well as the indictments that Black theology has against the institutions that are supported by evangelicals. The direct impact of this book on *The Liberating Marriage* was minor however the indirect influence was great. Though *Introducing Black Theology* was not quoted throughout the project, it did help with the initial framing of the investigating student's worldview concerning how white evangelicals view liberation theology.

*Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*¹⁰

Bearing a similar title to the Fields offering, the similarities end there. This book by Dwight N. Hopkins delves deeper into the experience of the African American experience and uncovers the subsequent worldview of God and the theology produced by African Americans. Riding the wave initially caused by James Cone, Deotis Roberts and others Hopkins in the words of Jeremiah Wright "Broadens the horizons and scope of this exciting field" with the inclusion of womanist theology. This book contributed heavily to

⁹ Bruce Fields, *Introducing Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

¹⁰ Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY 1999, Orbis).

the shaping of the theological foundation of *The Liberating Marriage*. The depth of thought employed by Hopkins is to be a model of the African American theological thinker.

***Let Mt. Zion Rejoice*¹¹**

“*Let Mt. Zion Rejoice* is a practical resource for... [Those] involved in music and worship in the African American church.” This description on the back cover of the book that has been abbreviated for our use is in no way guilty of false advertisement. James Abbington has produced what some consider the most practical contemporary handbook for music in the Black church. Without reinventing the wheel of Southern, Wilmore, and other historians Abbington looks intently at the current state of music while championing the need for practicality. He argues that there needs to be a cohesive relationship between the musician and the pastor or the song and the sermon. This argument is one that works in consecrated concert with the premise and backbone of *The Liberating Marriage*. Abbington’s work is cited throughout the final document.

***Protest and Praise Sacred Music of Black Religion*¹²**

Jon Michael Spencer’s offering *Protest and Praise* sends out a clarion call as well as sets the bar for all young aspiring critical scholars. The depth of expert research

¹¹ James Abbington, *Let Mt. Zion Rejoice* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001).

¹² Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2002).

Though hardly any book of this nature could be exhaustive, Spencer captivates the reader with such depth of thought on every facet of the historical journey of music in America. He is masterful as he synthesizes history, the Bible and theology; the product is a new area of thought and even work, it's called Protest and Praise. *The Liberating Marriage* was greatly influenced by this book in almost every chapter; however one chapter stands out in the context of the project, chapter ten. Spencer does a stellar job as he treats the musicality of Black preaching. He describes the tonal celebration called the "whoop" through the various factors involved such as call and response, rhythm etc. The premise of the investigating student's hypothesis receives a great boost of promise from this book. *Praise and Protest* is cited within the project.

*The Sacred Art*¹³

There is no way that the section on preaching and the section on theology in *The Liberating Marriage* could have ever been completed if it were not for Olin Moyd's book, *The Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Tradition*. Moyd's piece is seminal in the field. For while Cleophus Larue, Henry Mitchell and Frank Thomas all have done work in Black Preaching and James Cone and others have done work in Liberation Theology, Olin P. Moyd blazed a trail in *The Sacred Art*. Evenhandedly arguing both preaching and theology this book not only helped the project but it is helping to shape a new worldview for preaching. The researchers argument deals with the marriage between sermons and songs in the African American church and the liberation theology contained therein. It is also clear that for a marriage to work two

¹³ Olin Moyd, *The Sacred Art* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995).

separate entities must become one. Moyd alludes with almost the clarity of any order that in order for preaching to be whole, good theology must be present. Moyd says that “If preaching is swimming in a pool, theology must be present to make sure that preaching does not go off into the deep end.” Moyd is quoted throughout the final document.

*Somebody's Calling My Name*¹⁴

One would be more than remiss if when naming the scholars on African American church music they failed to mention the name of Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker. Walker known for many books may be best known for this, his most popular offering which is arguably the most cited book in regards to the power of the Black song. *Somebody's Calling My Name* describes with great scholarship the music: of the motherland; of the middle passage; of reconstruction and Jim Crowism; of the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of Gospel as well as forecasts what is to come. Dr. Walker is clear in his premise that what the people sing is directly related to who and where the people are socially. The songs were not only a testimony but also a way of escape. This book also serves as scholar support for the work done in *The Liberating Marriage*. Walker's work is cited extensively throughout the project.

¹⁴ Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979).

*Slave Religion*¹⁵

Slave Religion by Albert Raboteau is an astounding book that treats the struggle of the slave as both a kidnapped African as well as an American transplant. The reader can easily see the difficulties in the evolving religious system and/or worldview. While arriving with one view and then being exposed to another the African slave then had to contend with the different African religious practices that may have been foreign to their own. The focus of the book is the entire “invisible institution.” This first church was what nurtured the hope and the liberating theology that is indicative of subsequent African American churches. Raboteau is awesome in his description of the details of the triumphs and trials of the brush harbor gatherings. These details help the researcher to be visually and emotionally connected to the African slaves who were prohibited from worship freely. There was something about the African worship that was liberating. *The Liberating Marriage* with source material gathered from this book offers a suggestion. Albert J. Raboteau is cited in the final project:

¹⁵ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

*The Social Teachings of the Black Churches*¹⁶

Gayraud Wilmore states, “This is an important book for both the lay and scholarly communities.” This quote that is captured on the back of the book is an honest assessment of Peter Paris’ work. Written not in the language of the seminary but in the language of the marketplace Paris takes some of the most complex sociological truths and translates them into the language of the common man. The premise of the Black church being a social organization and not necessarily a theological one at least at its inception opens the door for practical argument as well as a great discussion of liberation theology. Paris discusses everything from the dilemma facing the autonomy of our churches today to the moral and political expectations that are placed on the church. This book has contributed to the mindset and worldview of the investigating student in that the entire view of the church has been done in the context of the social climate. True liberation theology that is discussed in *The Liberating Marriage* is not only done on the individual level but is done within the context of the community.

*They Like To Never Quit Praisin’ God*¹⁷

Touted by Henry Mitchell as the sequel to his book, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God* is a landmark book in the field of preaching. Thomas argues that all preaching or all good preaching is centered on the

¹⁶ Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teachings of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press).

¹⁷ Frank A. Thomas, *They’d Like to Never Stop Praisin’ God* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996).

celebration. He contends that true celebration that is indicative of the gospel transcends race, culture, denomination, gender, class and any other barriers of the like. The celebrative moment is only insured by the assurance of God's grace. Thomas' arguments in this offering make it clear to the researching student why the slaves could continue to worship even in the midst of bondage. They had an assurance of God's grace that came through the preaching of the slave preacher. There was celebrative quality that transcended geography and situation. This celebrative quality gave hope and liberation. Thomas' work both here and in his other writings and teachings are quoted in the project.

*The Music of Black Americans*¹⁸

This massive volume of work is the foremost book as it pertains to the history of African American music. Unlike Walker's book Eileen Southern does not just treat religious music but traces the evolution of all genres of black music with the changing times within the social climate of Black Americans in this country. Southern's relentless scholarship and attention to details is paramount as she moves from era to era and from genre to genre. She is even able to handle all of the times and textures of music even handedly. Her depth and width of scope has been quoted by the aforementioned offerings that treat music. It is because of the sheer mass of this work that the investigating student was able to find a thin strip of argument upon which to base this project. *The Liberating Marriage* is supported both directly and indirectly by the great work of Eileen Southern.

¹⁸ Eileen Southern, *The Music of African-Americans: A History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1971).

*This Far By Faith*¹⁹

Quinton Dixie and Juan Williams, the authors of *Eyes on the Prize*, collaborate on this truly powerful book. *This far by Faith* treats the entire spectrum of the black experience of Africans in America and goes a few places where others have not dared to tread. Using the lens of religion, more specifically the lives of a few champions of religion as their framework, they masterfully color in all of the details. Beginning with the South Carolinian slave trade and ending with the hip-hop gospel style of Kirk Franklin this duo covers both a plethora of information as well as spans of time. Dixie and Williams' deposit has helped the investigating student further hone the argument in *The Liberating Marriage*, which is that the singing and preaching of the African American church has almost alone provided the hope and liberation needed to preserve this people.

¹⁹ Quinton Dixie and Juan Williams, *This Far By Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Our Worship is For Real

*"You don't know my story all the things that I've been through. You can't feel my pain what I had to go through to get here. You'll never understand my praise don't try to figure it out; because my worship, my worship is for real."*¹ One needs only to read these lyrics aloud to assess that the "real worship" and "praise" therein is in direct correlation to the "pain" of the "story". This is a song that, is unlike most of the songs of the contemporary genre of gospel music. Penned by Minister Vashawn Mitchell and recorded by Bishop Larry Trotter and the Sweet Holy Spirit Full Gospel Baptist Church both of Chicago, it contains tenets of a liberation theology that is inherent to the worship experience of the African-American people. It is an offering in which the inferences used are indicative of those used in the sermons and songs of the historic Black Church since its inception; inferences that employ the underpinnings of liberation theology. In fact, the writer suggests that there is a personal external story that is closely related to the praise and worship that takes place in the church. According to the song, the "real-ness" of the praise and worship that one does in the church is directly related to the story that has gone on outside the church. If this is true, as the researcher and research will suggest, Africans in the Americas during slavery, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement and even today have always had real worship. This is not to suggest that other groups that

¹Vashawn Mitchell, *My Worship is For Real* (Indianapolis, IN: Tyscot Music Group, 2001).

have suffered in America experience less sincerity or authenticity in their worship, it is merely the presentation of the premise that authentic praise and worship in the African-American church and among its people is in direct correlation to their “story” and/or experiences. Further still the songs and sermons have acted many times as the lone sustainer to this oppressed people.

Through both the songs and the sermons of the African-American church the worship has always been related to the social condition or the story of Blacks in America. This is what is considered “real” worship; worship that is related to the “story.” Authentic worship is an outpouring of either the experience of or the anticipation of the story’s outcome. Therefore, the real worship that personifies the African-American church experience, as expressed in sermon and song, has been and is merely an outpouring that is in direct relation to the outcome of the story of the people. Though many times the half of the story has not been told, every week there have been the sermons and songs of worship. The organized yet invisible conspiracy of systemic genocide that has been waged against the Black man as well as the subsequent frustration and disappointment experienced by Black women is the story that has been played out on the screen of America for centuries. However, amazingly it has not thwarted the ardent belief that God was bigger than any situation.

The inherent belief of the men and women of African decent in Deity has always led to their celebration of that Deity. Despite what may be considered popular belief the African in America did not find God only when dealing with the horrific social and economic situation, there was already knowledge of and relationship with God. Dr.

Dwight Perry in his book, *Breaking Down Barriers: A Black Evangelical Explains the Black Church*, quotes noted scholar Melville Herskovits who concurs,

The prominent place held by religion in the life of the Negro in the United States, and the special forms assumed by the Negro version of Christian dogma and ritual, are customarily explained as compensatory devices to meet the social and economic frustration experienced by Negroes during slavery and after emancipation. Such explanations have the partial validity we have already seen them to hold for various phases of black secular life; but as must be emphasized again, cannot be regarded as telling the entire casual tale. For underlying the life of the American black is a deep religious bent that is but the manifestation here of a similar drive that everywhere in black societies makes the supernatural a major focus of interest.²

As mentioned it is this inherent drive to recognize God that leads to the outpouring of worship. Worship that W.E.B. Du Bois characterized by what he considered its three most important elements “The preacher, the music and the frenzy.”³ This frenzy describes the overwhelming presence and demonstration of emotion in African American worship.

The sermons and songs of the African in America were and are the main vehicle of celebrative response to what God has done. This “real” worship is a celebration that is a natural outpouring of an experienced or anticipated outcome. It is this worship that evolved into what is known today as the historic Black church. It is an entity that Wyatt Tee Walker argues does not and cannot claim America as its place of origin:

The Black Church, as the most important institution in the Black community, is the reservoir of Africanisms that has survived in the West. Much of the character of authentic Black religious life can

² Dwight Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers: A Black Evangelical Explains the Black Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 12.

³ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 211.

be traced directly or indirectly to Africa. The Black Church then is the American Fruit of an African Root.⁴

It is a fruit that has indeed had its share of both weeds and vermin to contend with. Vermin that invaded, ripped, raped and pilfered the African root of both her people and landscape. Weeds of genocide that tried to choke the life out of the human seed that was destined for greatness in spite of the racist soaked soil in which it was to be planted. It is reported that more than twenty million Africans died in the menacing Middle Passage of the mid-Atlantic; however this staggering statistic was still not enough to break the spirit of the African. “What was it”, paraphrasing Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr., Pastor of the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, “that made this people so strong”. Why was it, that to them nothing seemed insurmountable? What was the source of the inextinguishable flame that burned within their spirit?

The suggestion of this research is that it was a faith in God that kept this people from losing their mind; a faith that was carried upon the words of songs and sermons that were under girded by a theology of liberation. Songs like “ Soona will be don wit de troubles of dis’ worl’...go in home to be wit God”, testified to a literal belief in a Creator that was colossal enough to have fashioned the sun, yet concerned enough to fix their situation. Belief in God was central to the life of the African. Centuries prior to the holocaust of the sea, the African recognized and respected the Creator. It was God that though He was Creator, was very involved with all facets of the Africans life. “The events of life birth, death, puberty, fertility, harvest famine marriage tragedy-have religious rites that give expression...”⁵ All of life’s activity was centered on God. Since everything involved God there was no separation between what was considered sacred

⁴ Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 19.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

and what was considered secular. What made these people so strong was the inherent belief in God.

It was with this belief in God that the African boarded the ship. Noted pastor/scholar Dr. Frank Anthony Thomas contended in a recent interview:

“It was at that moment that the ‘Deconstruction of the Black Identity’ started. The African would be chained until they lost sight of their homeland and only then would the physical chains be removed; however there were new and unseen shackles on his mind and spirit. With his land and family gone he lost his identity both as a landowner and even as a husband/father. He became a beast of burden working in the mines and fields while his wife became a baby factory, they no longer knew who they were—the deconstruction of black identity. This created an incredible sense of loss and grief. How was it that the Africans dealt with such grief, they sang?”⁶

This deconstruction of the family and the community was against all that was inherent to the African. The concept of individualism was not African but European.

Wright stated in a recent interview:

The definition of self for the African was communal. It was “We’ll understand it Better By and By” and “We Shall Overcome.” John Mbiti said it best when he said, “I am because we are.” In essence it is a long way from the European subscription encapsulated in Descartes statement “I think therefore I am.” The identity of the African was formed within the construct of the “we”. I have no identity outside of the community. It took two people to get me here, it will take at least six to carry me out and upon death I join a great cloud of witnesses; my identity is formed by the community.⁷

The mindset of this people was simply that even though this suffering is real, we will not only suffer together but we will sing. As Eileen Southern states, “the function of music was a communal activity...” Singing and music was central to the life of the African almost as central as the worship of Deity. Even in a strange land these people

⁶ Frank A. Thomas, Personal Interview by Eugene L. Gibson, Jr., December 2, 2002.

⁷ Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Personal Interview by Eugene L. Gibson, Jr., November 7, 2002.

dared to sing. Wright continued, “Contained within ‘The Slave Narratives’ there is a first person testimony that states, “we sang our prayers, we sang our sermons, and we sang our reality’.”⁸ This singing was preserved by one of the important of the Africanisms mentioned by Walker, the oral tradition. Hildred Roach states this about the importance of the oral tradition:

The method of oral tradition was greatly responsible for the maintenance of the samples of African heritage, which miraculously survived the centuries. Because of the illiteracy of most Blacks (at least in the English language) and because of the diversity of African languages, a process of rote teaching was instrumental in sustaining the legends and music of old Africa. Although many Africans had composed their own symbols to represent language sounds, the oral tradition was still by far the most common practice in Africa for decades, and remained the most effective method of reaching the thousand of slaves in America.⁹

The Africans were herded like cattle aboard ships and arrived here in the Americas from Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Zaire, and parts of the Congo. As they emerged from the ships all looked lost for this mixed nation of aliens, yet much to the disbelief of the entire world, like oral tradition many other important cultural elements survived. Two of the most prominent inherent elements were singing and dancing.

Southern notes:

Africans were taken to the new World in chains, stripped to the bare skin, and those that came to the mainland colonies were generally separated from their families and communities. But though they could bring no material objects with them, they retained memories of the rich cultural traditions they had left behind in the motherland and passed these traditions down to their

⁸ Ibid., Interview.

⁹ Hildred Roach, *Black American Music: Past and Present* (Boston, MA: Crescendo Publishing Co., 1973), 9.

children. The importance given to music and dance in Africa was reflected among black men in the colonies-in the songs they sang and in their dancing and folk festivals.¹⁰

Armed with only unwavering belief in Deity and the vehicle of music and dance the African foot came into contact with soil that would one-day house his blood. He quickly encountered a religion much different than his own.

Common to many African societies was belief in a High God, or Supreme Creator of the world and everything in it. It was also commonly believe that this High God was associated in the sky, somewhat removed from and uninvolved in the activities of men, especially so when compared to the lesser gods and ancestor spirits who were actively and constantly concerned with the daily life of the individual and the affairs of the society as a whole.¹¹

This coupled with separation from the essentials of family and community the slave faced an august obstacle. However, as the African steeped in African culture began to come in contact with the religion of this new land a child was spawned a new and authentic religious worldview, called the “black sacred cosmos.”

The black sacred cosmos or the religious worldview of African-Americans is related both to their African heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as sacred, as to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath”.¹²

Depending upon the culture and history of a particular African-related religious tradition, different sacred object(s) or figures(s) will be at the center of the black sacred cosmos. For the more African-based syncretic religions of the Caribbean and Latin America like the Voodoo of Haiti, the Obeia of Jamaica, the Santeria of Cuba, and the Candomble and Umbanda of Brazil, African deities and spiritual forces played a more prominent role in

¹⁰ Eileen Southern, *The Music of African-Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1971.), 23.

¹¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: the Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 52.

¹² C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 3.

the rituals of worship of the people. For African American Christianity, the Christian God ultimately revealed in Jesus of Nazareth dominated the black sacred cosmos.¹³

As a result the African American church has always been a synthesis of the best of African culture and Christian theology.

One may quickly be prompted to ask, however, why would the African in slavery be willing to sacrifice his/her own belief system to belief in this God Jehovah? Dr. Tony Evans tackles this question with this answer in his book *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, when he says:

When people take their culture with them to a new locale, it is the central elements of the culture that are the easiest to salvage. The centerpiece of the West African culture was God. All of life was interpreted in terms of the Divine. This explains why there was such a quick and easy gravitation toward Christianity ... Since God was the African slave's reference point for all of life, He (God) would be the first One to whom the slave would appeal especially in the time of crisis.¹⁴

However, they needed a common denominator between themselves and the God of this "new locale"; they needed a reason to sing, dance and celebrate. Vincent Winbush is quoted in the African-American Jubilee Bible as saying:

...The Africans were quick to notice the influence the Bible had on the "self-image, culture, and orientation" of these slave owners. Slaves heard their captors refer to the Bible as 'Holy Scripture' or 'Holy Book', and soon they began to associate the Bible with power.

African slaves sought to engage the "Book" and thus demonstrated their "ability to adapt themselves to different understandings of reality.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Anthony T. Evans, *Are Black Spiritually Inferior to Whites?: The Dispelling of an Americana Myth* (Wenonah, NJ: Renaissance Productions, 1992), 71.

The African once exposed to “The Book” saw it through a different lens. However, they did not see a God that gloried in the oppression of peoples, but they looked with the eye of God through a lens that sought mercy, justice, and grace simultaneously and for the first time looked at liberation. One of the ways to communicate this liberation was through music and sermonizing. It was through the marriage of the sermons and songs primarily, in addition to other Africentric elements such as poetry, symbols and drama, that worship in the African-American experience was personified and created the Du Bois’ “frenzy.” This is an outpouring of the expectation or the experience of liberation. J. Deotis Roberts describes what happens during worship in the black church, “Worshippers are transported psychically from a hostile and precarious world to a smaller and more secure one that will equip them to face that hostile environment again.”¹⁵

The most important draw of the African to Christianity was their hope in physical salvation and rescue from the agonizing abyss of slavery. Though they could clearly see the similarities between the story of the Children of Israel and the unwritten chapters of their lives as Africans in America; the theology of the scriptures was a second-level operation. They did begin to realize however that overbearing mirror image between the Israelite people in Egypt and the African in America was one that at its nucleus was cast by the reality of suffering.

The Children of Israel had suffered and been delivered and it was the belief of the African that the same God would deliver them. Consequently this was one of the two major reservoirs of hope for the African; that God was experienced in delivering a people

¹⁵ J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 92.

from the injustices of slavery. However important, this commonality alone was not enough to necessitate the formation of the church.

The major commonality or main driving force in the formation of the church was the identification with the God of this Jesus-faith. Not only had the Children of Israel suffered but their God had suffered as well. Jesus, the very Son of God was able to understand all that they were going through because He, too, had endured suffering. Thomas in a sermon called, *The Scandal of a Vulnerable God*, preached in his pulpit at the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis stated, “that though it seems almost scandalous to imagine a God that could die, this God was the only one who could defeat suffering and death. Furthermore, the only means of defeating suffering and death was to offer Himself up to endure suffering and dying...Dr. King a man of love knew that the only way he would ever have a chance to defeat hate was to become a victim to it.”

This is why there is at the core of the “black sacred cosmos” in America a love affair with Christ. This common identity and association with the Children of Israel and Jesus the Christ, as fellow sufferers was the springboard that launched the African American church and its Christocentric style of worship. Consequently the “nature” of black worship, which had its own cultural distinctiveness in the song, sermon, and shout, emanated from the merging of both the surviving Africanisms of the old world with the creative adaptation of the Bible of the New World into a new synthesis for liberation.¹⁶

In a captivating scene of the 1997 DreamWorks movie release *Amistad*, this statement is depicted. In the scene Cinque, the African that led the revolt on the ship *La*

¹⁶ J. Alfred Smith, “The Ecumenical Nature of African American Church Music” in *The African American Church Hymnal* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001).

Amistad, observes one of his friends looking through the pages of a Bible. He says to his friend jokingly, "You can put that book away now there is no one looking." The friend quickly rebuts enthusiastically, "No, I think I understand it!" He then goes on to, just by looking at the pictures, explain the Gospel to Cinque. His final statement is the one that was not only profound but also prophetic to the African people he portrayed and from whose loins he is a descendant. After explaining that "the One who the sun follows" (Jesus) was the answer to the problems of a suffering people (the Children of Israel) and miracles that He performed, he mentioned how "He" was killed and rose into "the sky". He then said to Cinque, "this is where we will go when they kill us here...it doesn't look so bad" (It ain't so bad).

This is what has seemed to emerge both as lyrics and song for the African people since they were forced to take residence on American soil; it ain't so bad! Through hundreds of years of legalized chattel slavery they sang, "It ain't so bad." Being called three-fifths of a human, they replied, "It ain't so bad." During Reconstruction and Jim Crow the resounding tune was, "It ain't so bad." On the bus of the freedom riders and in the sit-ins of civil rights movement one could faintly hear the resonate chorus of their actions that reminded them, It ain't so bad. Though having knowledge that the African man is being systemically hunted and even though most of the people related to a young man currently in the enemy's cross hairs, the refrain was still, "It ain't so bad." Even when Medgar, Malcolm and Martin were laid to rest, as martyrs of their God and their people, through tears and in harmony this people proclaimed, "It ain't so bad." So once again when this people is faced with the question of Dr. Wright, one that the world has been pondering for years, "What makes you so strong?" they answer with the

resounding refrain, “Jesus is the Answer...” And as long as He is the answer, “It ain’t so bad.” This statement and belief was and is deeply engrained into the moral and spiritual fiber of this people and it provided their greatest need, hope.

It was with this hope that, in the words of Quincy Jones they “taught their pain to sing” and told the story of liberation, the sermon. Lincoln and Mamiya state, “In the Black church good preaching and good singing are almost invariably the minimum conditions of a successful ministry. Both activities trace their roots back to Africa where music and religion and life itself were all one holistic enterprise.”¹⁷

They Never Took Our Song

During a recent sermon from the Acts 16, Paul and Silas in jail, the Rev. Marvin Ellis Wiley pastor of Rock of Ages Baptist Church in Chicago encouraged his parishioners “Never let anyone take your song.” Upon hearing this, the investigating student quickly identified the relevance to this project. As a people African-Americans have made it this far because, even though many have tried, they never took our song.

As mentioned several times earlier singing to the African as well as the African in American has been a central component to the life; almost as central as Deity. Many of the Africanisms, preserved through oral tradition have been preserved with the most integrity in the area of music. Consequently many similarities will be seen between the musical tradition of the African on his/her native soil of the motherland and the African on this foreign soil of America. In Africa music and singing were essential to life in that there was specific music for various stages of life as well as many of life’s regular

¹⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Church Experience*, 346.

experiences. Births, first tooth, onset of puberty, betrothal, and rites of passage were all celebrated by specific music. Southern reports that music in African society was used not only in worship but in everyday life; in formal and informal ways:

Special kinds of music were called for during the preparation for war or for embarking upon a major hunting expedition; similarly there were musical rituals associated with victory celebrations, whether in observations of the defeat of an enemy or of a successful hunt. Among all the nations, one of the most important festivals occurred when local rulers and chiefs paid homage to the king in the nation's capitol.

Then there was the music involved in religious rites-worship of the gods, of the lesser divinities and spirits, and of the ancestors. Closely related to religious rites were those associated with funerals, particularly of important persons of the community and royalty. Among some of the peoples of Angola (now the Congo and Zaire) there was a tradition for litigation music. In presenting cases to the judge-chief, the litigants chanted their arguments to the accompaniment of drums and song. All music was ceremonial and ritualized, and frequently performed in conjunction with dance and/or drama by professional musicians.

But a large part of the music making in Africa took place on a less formal, highly socialized level that brought together members of the community in either selective groups or as a whole to share in common experiences.¹⁸

Some of the music that was performed was gender specific. There was certain music that the women performed; songs that dealt with home and children while the more masculine offerings that dealt with war and hunting the men performed. It must be noted again with haste that music included the use of the dance, poetry and drama as one movement. To the African it was one movement; to sing was to dance and to have drama. It was a natural outpouring of life's events and how God interacted with their life.

¹⁸ Eileen Southern, *The Music of African-Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1971), 9.

Music, poetry and the dance were inextricably interlinked and many times the poet and the musician were the same person. Sometimes, according to Southern, “...speech and music were integrated, with varying degrees of gradation among the four kinds of expression-speech, recitative, chant and song.¹⁹” The survival of this natural progression and subsequent integration of speech and music can be seen in the tonal celebration style used in traditional African-American preaching, which we will discuss later. It is also the opinion of the researcher that this tonal hybrid of speech and song can be seen in the hip-hop genre of rap.

The dancing component of music, Southern states, probably “appeared more exotic to European travelers than a musical performance.” The gesticulations of both the male and female dancers are widely recorded. Another commonality of the reports of the dancing of the Africans was the formation of the ring. John Atkins in his 1737 book *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West Indies* reports that the “men and women would make a circle and one at a time show great skills in agility antic motions and gesticulations... the company would make the music by clapping their hands together during the time [which was] helped by the louder noise of two or three drums.²⁰” One dance that was observed in 1826 by Major Denham, which has been regarded as typical recounted:

Men armed with sticks, which springing alternately from one foot to another, while dancing around in a ring, frequently flourished their sticks in the air, or clashed them together with a loud noise, performed the dance. Sometimes a dancer jumped out of the circle, and springing around on his heel for several minutes made his stick twirl above his head at the same time with equal rapidity; he would

¹⁹ Eileen Southern, *The Music of African-Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1971), 19.

²⁰ John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West Indies* (London: Century, 1737), 102.

then rejoin the dance. In the center of the ring there were two drummers standing on the ground.²¹

This awesome account that is almost two hundred years old confirms how through rich oral tradition, many Africanisms can still be seen today. It is far more than a probability that the dancing rings widely reported during the Great Awakening and especially during the Second Awakening have their roots in the rings of dance of the African ancestors. The rings during the “Awakenings” were the place where the “shout” would take place. The “shout” was the place where the slave and the antebellum freedman would encounter the sacred. Rudolf Otto in his classical description of the religious encounter states that any encounter with the sacred or the divine elicits feelings of “mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans” (the mysterious, the terrifying and the fascinating). The shout would take place immediately following the service and the “dancers” or “shouters” would make a circle. In the circle they would sing a “running spiritual” that would start off with a slow cadence accompanied by the clapping and stomping of the dancers in the ring. The syncopated polyrhythm produced by the hands and feet coupled with the singing of the people in the ring, which could last for seven to eight hours acted as the summoning of the spirit. “Those who were possessed or eventually dropped from sheer exhaustion, were immediately replaced by others waiting to take their places.”²² The presence of this African element of worship is still seen in a varied form in the African American worship experience today. When the experience of the worship climaxes in an emotional catharsis and the worshippers is “filled with the

²¹ Denham Dixon, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa* (London: Century, 1828), 12.

²² C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 352.

spirit” they will start to dance. The seemingly involuntary movement of hands and feet as well as an assortment of verbal ejaculations that can vary from “Thank You Lord” and “Been So Good” to the “speaking in tongues”.

One secular proof of the survival of Africanisms can be drawn from the account given by Major Denham is that the African dances seen in Africa greatly influenced the “stepping” practices of the African American Greek lettered organizations founded in the early 1900’s. This particular account is reminiscent of two fraternities in which both of the groups use canes (sticks). The men of Phi Beta Sigma are known for the creation of intricate polyrhythm by the tapping of the canes on the ground and together. The other fraternity that could be a descendant of the accounts is the noble men of Kappa Alpha Psi are not only known for the polyrhythmic tapping in Denham’s report, but also for the high precision twirling of the canes as described by Denham.

A great deal of this singing was done during festivals and ritualistic services used to commemorate one of life’s milestones. Most times in the singing of songs high importance was placed on being relevant. Many times the lyrics of a popular song would be changed to coincide with the affairs of the community or for a particular festival. This style and form of performance called “extempore” is indicative to both African music and its African American descendant. The extempore style of singing and music was not the only tenet of African music to survive; there are many others characteristics of music that survived to be intertwined with Western Music. In *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*, Jon Michael Spencer reports that the African tenets of melody, homophony (harmony}, polyrhythm, call and response, polyphony, heterophony and

improvisation are all used in some form in both the singing and sermons of the Black Church. It was through this singing that the slave would talk (sing) about their struggles.

The social condition was always lifted in the music so that the musical experience was one of relevance and not abstraction. This was seen in the slave-songs and sorrow song of the South.

Given in the history of African people in America, music became both the social and theological mooring for sanity. The late Br. W. Herbert Brewster, preacher/songwriter once said, 'there were some things that were just easier to sing about than to speak about.' The Negro spiritual became a source of empowerment and in some cases embarrassment. These songs in the key of African life in America, spoke to the issues of their hearts. *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*, seemed to be both a response to the icy indifference to racism, and the seeing heart of Jesus. *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* in a double entendre style describes the inconvenience until the welcome chariot would arrive.²³

The modern residue of this was seen during the Civil Rights Movement when many of the songs that were so effective such as *We Shall Overcome* were actually changed to fit the theme of the movement.

What was it that made the people really believe that they were going to overcome? It was a belief "deep in the hearts"; a belief planted there by the liberation theology in the songs. The songs and the singing of the songs gave the African, the slave the civil rights marcher and continue to give the churchgoer today, hope. The sojourn of this liberating music in the life of the African in America however has gone through unfriendly and sometimes dangerous territory.

Though when kidnapped the Africans retained many of the tenets of their culture, the music of the African or that the African was used to began to morph sometime after the abduction. The middle passage and slavery presented some of the most heinous

²³ Ozzie Smith, Personal Interview by Eugene L. Gibson, Jr., October 15, 2002.

conditions ever seen to these people however, the words of Dr. J.M. Ellison, the first Black President of Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, “They sang through the crisis.” Walker concurs in saying that it was “...natural then, in the face of the admittedly bestial slave trade that the uprooted forbears of Black Americans would retain {and use} at least the musical forms of their culture in a desperate attempt to escape total dehumanization.”²⁴

Due to the process of the “Deconstruction of the Black Identity” the African being separated from family and community was forced to find a common language to express and to release. Walker continues, “With no common tongue, the musical expression was reduced to chants and moans on the rhythm forms and in the musical idioms that survived. As slaves learned the language of their masters, their verbal commonality became most pronounced in the music that developed in the context of slavery.”²⁵

As they continued to learn this new language and apply new words to their own vocabulary the slave noticed that there were reoccurring references made to God and the “Holy Book.” This religious instruction was slanted with a theology of oppression in which the slave masters used the book to justify their actions. However as the slaves came into more contact with this book they began to hear stories that all of the masters were not telling. They heard stories that chronicled the narrative of Children of Israel in slavery and wilderness times and the God who was “mindful of them”. They also encountered one called Jesus who though very God of gods, suffered himself for the well being of man.

²⁴ Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

This was new singing material; this was liberating! In the words of the Rev Dr. Gardner Calvin Taylor, “the slaves and their children gave to the Christian faith a modern glossolalia”.²⁶ The Taylor statement created a place and space “where the masters said {that} the Bible declared one thing and the slaves heard something far different about what the Bible declared.”²⁷ Ozzie Smith continued the idea by stating that “The slave masters spoke of God’s ordained slavery. The slaves sang, ‘Go Down Moses, tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.’”²⁸ The African believed that the sovereign God was not a God of the oppressor but one that was concerned about the oppressed! It was not enough to conceal the fact that they knew what they were being taught was a lie without having some form of release. They could not only pretend that the God of the “Book” was not on there side without “stealing away” to be with Him. It was then Blassingame reports, that “the slaves formulated new ideas and practices on their own and specifically colored their religious principles with a pronounced longing for freedom. The meetings in the brush harbors and praise houses were filled with ecstatic singing that climaxed in a veritable frenzy of emotion.”²⁹ The slaves through their singing and the need for freedom had created what would become known as the “invisible institution” or the “invisible church.”

It was in the “invisible” church that black worship began to take its shape. The meetings of this congregation would be held from place to place and in addition to the services in which the white preacher or the slave preacher under the direct influence of the white preacher would preach the oppressive “slaves obey your masters” type of

²⁶ Gardner C. Taylor, quoted by J. Alfred Smith in the essay, “The Ecumenical Nature of African American Church Music” in *The African American Hymnal* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications 2001).

²⁷ Walker, *Somebody’s Calling My Name*, 17.

²⁸ Smith, “Church Music”.

²⁹ John W. Blassingame, *Slave Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 25.

sermon. Church would be far away from the earshot of the master. The services would be down in the brush harbors, sometimes even by the river. Wyatt Walker gives this insight:

The invisible church consisted of services conducted among the slaves, illegally in many instances, where the worship took on an altogether different tone from the tone in those services held under the auspices of the plantation owners. They met from place to place on individual plantations and sometimes on adjoining or nearby plantations out of the earshot of the masters' "big house." This invisible church was a direct response to the hypocrisy of the owner's religious faith and practice. The double meaning of the words of the faith songs evidenced the irony and resentment present.

The meetings of the "invisible church" could not have proceeded without the instrumentality of the oral tradition. The sheer force of circumstance required the slaves to "adopt" the language of the master. This coupled with the Bible narratives they picked up from religious practice around them (Bible reading and segregated worship services) provided the slaves with the raw material to fashion their own concept of God's providence and concern in the hellish condition of servitude. The dialect of English words transposed into the context of religious hope provided a universal commonality that heretofore was unparalleled.³⁰

The invisible church is where the slave could be free; free to exercise their African gifts. Free to dance and sing and even free to tell the true story of this God that their oppressors claimed. They believed that even though the church was invisible to the oppressor, God could see them and since He could see them they would eventually be all right. As mentioned earlier this is the anticipation of the outcome of the story, this is real worship. The faith song or spiritual of the slave was a song of liberation and it was performed in the invisible church.

These institutions were on most if not all of the plantations in the South and in some places they were even allowed until the revolts of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and especially Nat Turner. Using the theological view that God was a liberator and had

³⁰ Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name*, 31.

through God's Spirit called Him to fight for this liberation, Nat Turner the man that was called the Prophet led a rebellion in which sixty whites were killed. The aftermath of this insurrection forced the invisible church to become even less visible.

Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831...sent hot hate back and wide consternation all over the Southland. Generally, what independence Negro churches had enjoyed was taken away. A revised black code was enacted...silencing...colored preachers. A [white] church... [and] association...would take a Negro church as a branch; and thus the independence of the Negro church was further postponed.³¹

The use of religion was strictly outlawed in many places due to the effects it seemed to have on the slave. Slaves all over the South were prohibited from Negro religious services. Slaves were not to have worship without the presence of the master. It must however be noted with haste that this was a far cry from the Negro experience in the North.

From the middle of the eighteenth century Blacks in the North had experienced the luxury of having not only their own church but also their own denomination. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones is the first and oldest of all of the African-American church denominations. Allen, a former slave and Jones due to segregation and separatist practices of the Methodist church formed a mutual aid society called the Free African Society. This was supposed to be a group that was formed "for benevolent purposes only and without regard to religious tenets."³² However, the Society began to function both in the secular as well as the sacred realm. Soon thereafter the Free African Society erected a church called St. Thomas'

³¹ Miles Mark Fisher, *What is a Negro Baptist?* in Lincoln and Mamyia, *Black Church in the African American Experience*, 51.

³² Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen George A. Singleton*, ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1960), 25.

African Episcopal Church and Absalom Jones became the pastor. Jones only served as pastor because Allen declined the pastorate due to his loyalty to the Methodist church that had treated him so unfairly. However his belief was that “no religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodists.”³³ He later became the founding pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The story of the history of African American music reached an interesting point with the founding of the A.M.E. church. Like the Baptists the Black Methodists fashioned their identity denominationally after the white Christians who evangelized them. This was also seen many times in the music as many times as there began to be a shift from the African spirituals that once personified the Black worship experience to the more “white” music indicative of the Eurocentric experience. In many areas of the country and in many churches Africentric music or music that recounted the struggle of this people especially was frowned upon after slavery was over. “The spiritual in some cases became a source of embarrassment...the embarrassment aspect of these songs surfaced when our people began to go to college. The songs were banned and often referred to as cotton field ditties, by some black intelligentsia- they were seen beneath higher learning.”³⁴ This created a rift in the type of music offered in the church. Dr. Wright in his Doctor of Ministry dissertation explains the church experiences varied radically between what took place in Northern congregations and what went on down in South Virginia. The more assimilated the Black community the more Eurocentric the musical worship experience, however the less assimilated the congregation the more Africentric the musical worship experience. This is due to the liberating content of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ozzie Smith, Personal Interview by Eugene L. Gibson, Jr. October 15, 2002.

music. It is the researchers opinion that when one feels as if they are free they need not sing about freedom; consequently many of the affluent blacks felt that since they has “made it” the faith-songs were no longer relevant to what they were experiencing socially. On the other hand those that had not yet escaped the tormenting tentacles of racism and the residue thereof needed the hope found in the Spirituals. Many things can be said about the power of this form of music and even about its social significance but Walker says it best when he says:

And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song –the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side [of] the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but not withstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.³⁵

This need for the hope found in the music of the African slave and freedman in American continued through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movement is even present today. However the music has evolved.

During the period after the Emancipation Proclamation called Reconstruction, Blacks experienced more freedoms than they had ever before and arguably have ever since. Noted African-American historical scholar Lerone Bennett in his seminal book *Before the Mayflower* reports that:

Never before had the sun shone so bright.

A former slave named Blanche Kelso Bruce was representing Mississippi in the United States Senate. Pickney Benton Stewart Pinchback, young, charming, daring, was sitting in the governor’s office in Louisiana.

³⁵ W.E. B. DuBois *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 206.

In Mississippi, South Carolina and Louisiana, black lieutenant governors were sitting on the right hand of power. A black was secretary of state in Florida; a black was on the state supreme court in South Carolina. In these and other Southern states blacks were superintendents of education, state treasurers, adjunct generals, solicitors, judges and major generals of militia.

The millennium hadn't come, of course but there were some who believed it was around the next turning...

These things as improbable as they may seem now happened in America during the ten improbable years (1867-1877) of Black Reconstruction.³⁶

It was during this time that the music of the Black church began to change in some areas. Known for its preservation through the oral tradition this music was now, due to educational opportunities before denied, being written and published. Both spirituals, now anthemically arranged and hymns were being published. The entity that was most noted for the emergence of this written hymn music was the A.M.E. church. Steeped in the Eurocentric Methodist tradition Bishop Daniel Payne and many others tried but were unsuccessful in extricating the church from the emotional singing of spirituals and folk songs. Richard Allen himself wrote many hymns. It was one of Allen's successors however the Right Reverend Daniel Alexander Payne that promoted hymns to be the only viable expression and offering of music ministry in the Northern Black church. Payne began to publish his hymns and bring them to the forefront of the Black religious worship experience. He often had nothing but a negative critique for the Negro worship experience and called the spirituals "cornfield ditties". He sought a more educated and informed worship experience on that was indicative of the freedom he must have enjoyed; one that many Negroes in the south could not comprehend. He was the successful author of two books that Eileen Southern call "invaluable" (above value) to

³⁶ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 5th ed. (New York: Penguin Books 1961), 214-216.

the Black church's written musical history, *Recollections of Seventy Years (1888) and History of the African Methodist Church (1891)*.

It must be noted with haste that the music evolution and revolution that was taking place in the African-American community was not only social and toward the ways of the slave master but also theological and toward the ways of the Master. In 1907 at the five-week Azusa Street Revival a pastor/teacher named Charles Harrison Mason was in attendance. This gathering boasted that God was pouring God's Spirit on all flesh and the evidence of this was "spirit drunkenness" and the "speaking of tongues." Many people who had received this "spiritual outpouring" practiced glossolalia and Mason who had founded The Church of God in Christ some nine years earlier was one of them. "The Spirit came upon the saints and upon me...So there came a wave of glory into me, and all of my being was filled with the glory of the Lord...When I opened my mouth to say Glory, a flame touched my tongue which ran down to me. My language changed and no word could I speak in my own tongue. Oh! I was filled with the Glory of the Lord. My soul was then satisfied."³⁷

Several Black congregations including the Church of God in Christ and some Baptists congregations refused to give up the highly emotional and existential styles of worship. The theological issue of the speaking in other tongues did not in any way separate the worshiper or church from the commitment to praising God in a way that was consistent with the culture that was inherent to the African. If anything it may have strengthened this commitment.

³⁷ James Patteron, Oglethorpe, Julia Mason Atkins and German R. Ross ed. *History and Formative Years of the Church of God in Christ with Excerpts from the Life and Works of Its Founder-Bishop C.H. Mason* (Memphis, TN: Church of God and Christ Publishing, 1976), 10.

The interesting phenomenon was not that there were two African-American churches forming each having its own unique and different style of worship but that there was a third, a hybrid of them both. Churches began using both the hymn style of the educated and cultured church with the emotion of the struggle that manifested itself in the “real worship” that personified the church of the South. A clear indication of this was seen in the early 1800’s with the use of Meter Hymns commonly known in the Black church as “Dr. Watts.”

Named for Dr. Isaac Watts the composer of many hymns this “lining out” tradition was used to help the slaves who could not read sing the hymns as well. It employed the Africanism of call and response. A preacher, a deacon or a worship leader would sing out one or two lines and the congregation would follow thereafter singing the same line in a different tune. Many times the tune of the song was changed from its original tune to a more familiar melody or to an African tune, to reflect the present feeling of the struggle.

Socially things were not looking good for the African in America as two court cases, Dred Scott (1857) and Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) further illuminated the need for a God that would be concerned about the oppressed. Dred Scott disallowed for whites to respect the United States citizenship of any Negro while “Plessy” rendered a judgment that was in all ways “separate” but in most ways “unequal.” This separate yet unequal campaign set the stage for the days of the 20th century. This discrimination and prohibition of equal goods and services was the reality for millions of Blacks in the South. Though scared often to the point of paralysis with the threat of lynching and beating they sang, “*There Must Be a God Somewhere.*” Through murders, mayhem and

even the worst possible situations they never took our song. “There was a philosophy of freedom, a theology of liberation, a song of protest that would not surrender to the slave master’s rawhide and the hangman’s noose. Through our “weary years,” and along our “stony road,” the silenced drums keep beating and marching souls keep traveling triumphantly.”

The stage was now set, as the stage is set Sunday after Sunday after the choir finishes singing the songs of Zion, for the climax of the song. It was now time for a Word from the Lord.

There’s Just Something About Preaching

The preacher tells of days long ago and of people whose sufferings were like ours...what we have not dared to feel in the presence of the Lord of the Land we now feel in church...our eyes become absorbed in a vision...The preacher begins to punctuate his words with sharp rhythms, and we are lifted far beyond the boundaries of our daily lives until we are drunk with enchanted vision... We take this feeling with us each day and it drains the gall out of our years, sucks the sting from the rush of time, purges the pain from our memory of the past, and banishes the fear of loneliness and death.³⁸

This is in many ways the historic and current testimony of the African-American churchgoer. There has been and is something in the preaching that lifted the parishioner above circumstances and equipped them to withstand the onslaught of a hostile world. It is understood that music plays an important role in the history of church yet one must never dismiss the liberating power of the preaching moment.

Throughout the historical development of the Black Church over the past two hundred years, the sermon has served a wide variety

³⁸ Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Voices* quoted by Walter Pitts Jr. in *Old Ship of Zion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1.

of functions and purposes: its primary purpose has been to glorify God but it has also served as theological education and Sunday School; ritual drams and show time; singing and humming; encouragement and political advice; and moralizing therapy all rolled into one. Everything in the sermon is directed toward the point of emotional climax and catharsis. Shouts of “Amen” and “preach it” fill the air to show agreement while the ubiquitous call of “well?” tend to urge the preacher on. The congregational members do not sit passively but are intimately engaged. Sermons that stir the whole being mark the difference between a fine lecture and the heights of good preaching.³⁹

In concurrence with this quote from Lincoln and Mamiya, Dr. Frank Thomas explains in his preaching lectures that, “good preaching is preaching that engages all five of the senses.” He recounts a story by James Forbes as he described the preaching of Gardner Calvin Taylor. Thomas said, “Forbes told me that ‘Dr. Taylor was preaching about the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 and by the time the father and son met on the road at the end, we could see the reunion in the aisle of the sanctuary.’ Now that is some preaching.” This feeling that is the result of the genius of Black preaching has made preaching paramount in the Black religious experience.

J. Deotis Roberts states in his book *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry*, “The Black Church is essentially pulpit centered.” There is and has never been a more powerful media in the Black Community. The church has been a “bulwark never failing” and at the center of both the social and spiritual dimensions of the church have been the preacher and the preaching moment. It is no wonder that Peter Paris asserts that:

...It became the destiny of the black preachers to emerge the freest of all persons black and white alike, because they embodied the condition of independence and freedom more than any other. In their pulpits they could condemn virtually every social evil in either the white or the black community without

³⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Church in the African-American Experience*, 175.

fearing the possibility of censorship. Their condemnation of the established powers of the larger society for aiding and abetting racial injustice ensured the jubilant praise of their constituents and never their reproach. Only some willful violation of the black community's trust ever threatened their prestige and position.⁴⁰

As a descendant of the griot or the official storyteller in Africa the preacher was not only the one who knew the history of the people but also knew what God had to say about it. Jeremiah Wright concurs when he says, "It is similar to the question that Zedekiah asked in the text, 'Is there no word from the Lord?' Black people wanted to know assuredly that not only was God concerned about their situation but He had something to say (a word) toward its remedy."⁴¹ This is what people look for in the message, a word from the Lord; the Lord who is concerned about them and who is on the side of the oppressed and not on the side of the oppressor- a word from the God who liberated and does liberate. The word that is sought is one of hope, of liberation.

The story of Black preaching is strikingly similar to the story of Black music. The preaching, which employed the oral tradition was used to preserve the history. It was hard initially due to the "Deconstruction of the Black Identity" however it survived. In fact, Frank Thomas explains, "That the whole of the African-American preaching experience from the 1600's until 2002 has been about two things: the Reconstruction of the Black identity and the Hope and liberation of Black people." He continues, "I don't care where you are from, educated or not, whooper or lecturer, if it's black preaching it is going to be about one of those two things."

⁴⁰ Peter Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2000), 109.

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Jeremiah Wright by Eugene L. Gibson, Jr. on November 7, 2002.

Fresh off of the ships with a hope that they refused to let die they sang and they shared the story. A story that said there have been better days and better days are soon to come again. Many times in the early days of the church as during the days of the invisible institution the slave preacher was just selected out of the group.

Our preachers were usually plantation folk just like the rest of us. Some man who had a little education and had been taught something about the bible would be our preacher. The colored folks had their code of religion, not nearly as so complicated as the white man's religion but more closely observed... When we had our meetings of this kind, we held them in our own way and were not interfered with by the white folks.⁴²

The emergence of the art of Black preaching on the canvas of the American landscape was a masterpiece that was almost never experienced outside the plantation. This was due to the power of the preaching and its effect on the hearer. There was something about this Gospel that transformed mindsets and even made the slave think he/she was equal to whites in the sight of God, even though they were viewed as less than human in the eyes of the slaveholders. As a result early "Black Preaching" consisted of a Black preacher and a White congregation. Henry Mitchell states, "This may be why we have the record." The written record of the art of Black preaching may have never been realized if the early preaching had been done only in front of Black congregations. This is due of course to the overwhelming presence of an oral tradition in the culture of these transplanted Africans. Mitchell recognizes that in his statement and goes on further to give deeper and more contextual reasons for the fact that the first congregations in the world to experience the genius of liberation preaching were the oppressors themselves. Mitchell states,

⁴² Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 108.

It is ironic that many of the first Black preachers may have preached to more Whites than Blacks... This can be explained by several factors. One was that, in the early days of slavery, the number of Blacks who were permitted to hear Christian preaching was relatively limited. Many of the slave masters still held the humanity of Blacks under convenient suspicion. Masters were not willing to raise slaves above the level of animal property and thus concede that they were selling souls worthy of saving.⁴³

Mitchell's term "Convenient Suspicion" is an awesome assessment when one considers how relative some of the slave laws were. People seemingly were able to make their own laws based on a matter of convenience. By the time the first Black preachers were heard there were still those who questioned whether or not the Africans had souls.

The contradiction with this is that there were other Whites who practiced the baptism of Africans for at least one hundred years. David Henry Bradley reports that the earliest record of a Black being "converted" in the colonies was in 1623 when a man named Anthony, his wife Isabella and their child, William were baptized in Elizabeth City County in Virginia. While Albert Raboteau contends in his book, *Slave Religion*, the first slave to be baptized was when "a Negro woman belonging to Rev. Stoughton of Dorchester, Massachusetts" was baptized in 1641. The point is that either of these dates proves that Mitchell is correct in his assessment that many slave laws were written for the convenience and conscience of the slave masters.

Another factor was that from the very beginning of slavery, many slaveholders had latent misgivings about how unchristian the slave system was. So, when many masters finally did permit the unfortunate Blacks to hear the Word, the portions selected for them were distorted passages from Paul intended to sell slavery to the *slaves* as the "will of God" rather than the avarice of whites... A final factor that explains why Black preachers preached to White

⁴³ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1990), 24.

audiences may be that the Black preachers offered not only novelty but also real talent and rare power.⁴⁴

However despite a conscious effort by the slaveholders to harness the talent and powerful genius of these honey-hued heralds, God allowed their unequivocal gifts to “make room for them.”

There are many names of the earliest African-American preachers such as Josiah (Jacob) Bishop of Portsmouth, Virginia; William Lemon who pastored a Baptist church in Gloucester County, Virginia; Joseph Willis in southwest Mississippi; Henry Evans and a man known by the name “Uncle” Jack. However, by far the most noted of these forerunners to the names we know today, such as Sandy Ray, Gardner Taylor, Frank Thomas, Jeremiah Wright, Freddy Haynes and Rudy McKissick, was the Reverend Harry Hoosier known as “Black Harry”. Hoosier was said to preach all over the country both North and South as he traveled as the servant and companion of Bishop Asbury.

It must be noted that there were also women preachers of the day. The forerunner to Ella Mitchell, Carolyn Ann Knight, Alise Barrymore and Jasmin Sculark was the Reverend Jarena Lee. Although this mighty preacher, Rev. Lee, was never formally ordained, her ministry was heard by thousands of Blacks both slave and free as well as many whites as well. She was invited by Bishop Richard Allen many times to preach in his pulpit at Bethel the mother church of the African Methodist Episcopalians. She blazed trails for many of today’s most powerful women preachers.

However, unfortunately many instances today women preachers are still seen as second-class preachers. This of course depends on the audience, as there are many

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25.

women preachers such as Drs. Claudette Copeland and Cynthia Hale who are honored for their preaching abilities.

Three of the most noted Black pastors of the early years were George Liele, Andrew Marshall and Richard Allen. Allen who was a preaching contemporary of Black Harry also preached the majority of his first sermons to white audiences. Allen went on with Absalom Jones to start the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Liele and Marshall had the unique distinction of both pastoring the First African Baptist Church in Savannah. Liele who was there thirty years prior to Marshall is noted as one who paved the way for African-American preachers throughout time. Black preaching began to evolve both theologically and stylistically.

The theology of Black Preaching most times had a prominent social dimension to it. It was a medium to speak directly to the issues of the society. The preacher would speak about the social and legal policies and whether or not they lined up with or defied God's will for humanity. The sermon was not only spiritual but it was also prophetic. It raised the knowledge amongst the slaves that God knew what was going on and was interested. This led to revolt several times. In the instances of Denmark Vessey, Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner the revolts that they led were a direct faith response to the hypocritical actions of the masters. The preaching to lift up heads that were bowed down or to give encouragement to the disheartened is the type of preaching that is at the heart of the Black preaching tradition. However because of these revolts organized services and/or sermonizing were outlawed in many places in the South, due to the reaction of the Negroes when they heard this preaching. It seemed as if the "frenzy" might have scared the masters.

After the insurrection [Turner Revolt]...they were forbidden to meet even for worship. Often they are flogged if they are found singing or praying at home...My wife's brother Isaac was a colored preacher. A number of slaves went privately into a wood to hold meetings; when they were found out, they were flogged, and each was forced to tell who else was there. Three were shot two of whom were killed...for preaching to them, Isaac was flogged again and pickled; when it was nearly well, he was flogged again and pickled and so on for some months; then his back was suffered to get well and he was sold.⁴⁵

The suffering of the preacher was an ironic parallel to the suffering of the Savior of this religion as it caused a more fervent commitment to the social awareness preaching task. As Paris mentioned earlier, the Black preacher emerged “the freest of all people Black or White” in that he could speak out against the social condition. Black Preaching continued to be used to motivate Black people to action. The theology of Black Preaching was to liberate people from their social condition. It was used to elevate the hearer above the slave masters' animalistic view of them; to the view that since God fashioned them, not only were they inherently redeemable but they were also a constant concern of the Most High.

This theological belief mixed with the tenets of a strong West African Religious influence led to the worship services, which were celebrative and emotive in their style. This was most evident in the Black preaching. Black preaching embodied the whole of the African artistic expression. Kariamu Asante explains that in the song and the dance of the African many elements of artistic expression were seen. It is the contention of the researcher that these also can be seen in the preaching.

First is the sense of movement she calls
polyrhythm...Polycentrism, movement or motion spending
time...The sense of dimensionality. The dimensional aspect is

⁴⁵ Leslie H. Fishel and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro American: A Documentary History* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1967), 36-37.

characteristic of all senses and in that it is by definition extrasensory, involving the oral tradition...Epic memory is a memory that is called forth that delivers to the viewer [hearer] pathos, feeling and experience...Holistic sense silence is as much a part of the dance [sermon] as music or sound...Finally is repetition. The experience is intensified through repetition of one movement [spoken refrain or refrains], one sequence or the entire dance. Intensification is not static but goes by repetition from one level to another until ecstasy, euphoria, possession, saturation and satisfaction have been reached.⁴⁶

Mannerisms, tone and voice inflection, repetition call and response, role playing, story telling and rhetorical flair all were used according to Henry Mitchell as the style of Black preaching developed. It is amazing how closely these elements of African music and dance are use to engage the hearers of Black preaching. This speaks to an inherent love for and a soul that is affirming of the surviving Africanisms in the sermons of the Black church. The people would experience the sermon, experience God and experience ecstasy all in the same movement of worship. This became the expectation of good preaching, the emotional catharsis of the people.

As times changed so did the expectations of some preachers. Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne of the A.M.E. church charged that all of the clergy of the denomination ought to have an education. His burden to bring this to fruition was so strong that he founded Wilberforce University in Ohio. This was part of the beginning of the push for educated Black clergy. During this time however there were still many churches with preachers who barely could read. This set up an intellectual bias that is still in existence today. Eugene Gibson, Jr. states in a recent essay

“To be or not to be in seminary that is the question whether ‘tis more nobler in the ministry to suffer the slings and arrows from the traditional model of preparation or to take up the arms of seminary

⁴⁶ Molefi Kete Asante and Kariamu Walsh Asante, *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1993), 71.

training against the impending sea of troubles and by opposing end them⁴⁷...The cultural contention is that a formal seminary education might somehow undermine relationship and reliance on God.”⁴⁸

The debate fostered two belief systems. One was that educated preachers had lost their authenticity as a preacher to the African-American social condition while the indictment on non-educated preachers was that because of their ignorance a greater emphasis was placed on the spiritual side of it and not the cognitive elements of the sermon. The preachers would focus more on style than the substance. This style would usually consist of antics such as props and /or allegorical analogies and of course the “close.” The close of the message was the climax of the whole offering. Many times this would crescendo in a tonal celebration called the whoop.

Whooping was where the singing and the sermon became one. It is a tonal and rhythmic style in which the pulpiteer is singing while talking. This most times is the height of the dialogical moment-the climatic part of the sermon. Most of the whooping in the early Negro church was centered on the story of the cross. The story of Calvary is the most liberating of all of the liberating content. In fact Dr. D.E. King of the Monumental Church in Chicago used to warn young preachers, “Never preach sermons, always preach Jesus.” The story of the crucified Messiah is what would bring the most liberation. The liberation that was given was not only wrapped in the theological suggestions of a Sovereign that would become man and die for sins He did not commit but also in the presentation of the theology. Preaching as Phillip Brooks called it is “The communication of truth through personality.”

⁴⁷ Eugene L. Gibson, Jr., “To Be or Not To Be in Seminary That is the Question,” in *The African American Pulpit Winter 2001-2002 Edition* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

During the times of the invisible institution and the early church in the South many variants contributed to the need to whoop. The first is that music was the chief way to teach in the early church. The oral tradition had been preserved through music. A preacher could rest assured that if he/she closed the sermon with a whoop the parishioners who may not have been able to read would remember the singing part of the message or what Lincoln and Mamiya call “The Performed Word of God.” Secondly the feeling of hope was elevated when singing and sermon became one.

Finally like singing the sermon was a communal event. Preaching is dialogical. It is a conversation between the preacher and the congregation. The rhythm of the conversation delves into various areas of help and hope. Many times it is the congregation that pulls a preacher through whatever text and/or sermon they are dealing with. The congregation relies on the oration of the preacher to strengthen themselves as they listen. Roberts is right when he says, “Preaching in the Black church tradition is an awesome event for both the preacher and the congregation.”⁴⁸ It is during this dialogical event that hope and liberation occurs for both the preacher and the parishioner.

“Even in the midst of preaching, the worshipers carried on a dialogue with the preacher by shouting approval and agreements with ejaculations like “Amen!” or “Preach it!” or “Tell it like it is!” At other times they encouraged the preacher to work harder to that precipitating point of cathartic climax by calling out, “Well?”... “Well?” the highlight of the service was to worship and glorify God by achieving the achieving the experience of mass catharsis; a purifying explosion of emotions that eclipses the harshness of reality for a season and leaves both the preacher and the congregation drained in a moment of spiritual ecstasy.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 51.

⁴⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.

This spiritual ecstasy is a type of liberation for both those in the pulpit as well as those in the pew. This type of liberation is described earlier as the anticipation of the story's outcome. It must be noted that this type of preaching however is not the only preaching style that has given liberation. Liberation has also come from the non-whooping style of lecture-type preaching as well.

The non-whooping style or lecture style as well as the whooping style of preaching have both had their indictments to defend against. Like the identity issues between the hymn singers who refused to sing the "cornfield ditties" as Bishop Payne referred to them, so is the struggle with identity in the field of preaching styles.

Clearly the whooping style of preaching holds true to more Africanisms than the lecture while the lecturer most often has been educated. This sometimes lends itself to the debate as to what is good and acceptable African-American preaching. Does all good African-American preaching have to end in tonal celebration? Can you be an effective Black preacher in the lecture style without being accused of teaching and not preaching? Can you be a traditional Black preacher and yet be educated? The answer to all of these questions I believe was answered in the preaching and ministry of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King has been called a child of the Black Church. He was the son and grandsons of preachers in the African-American preaching tradition. Though not a whooper himself, King was exposed extensively to the traditional Black preaching style. In the evolution of his own preaching he employed stylistic variants such as call and response, rhythm, alliteration and escalating refrain. However traditional a preacher King may have been he was also highly educated. As a result he embodied where preaching

had been as well as where preaching was going. His education allowed him to walk through doors formerly locked to African-American clergy. He and his sermons represented a new hope and a new liberation for the Negro in America. His preaching was then heard on the national and international level because the of civil rights movement.

King's social gospel was indicative of the African preaching tradition from which he descended. He spoke prophetically about the social condition. His message was communal as he spoke of liberation for all Blacks and not just the few who are privileged. One of the most powerful Africanisms that King used with his preaching through the civil rights movement was the use of music and singing. "It is incomprehensible to think of Dr. King as the leader of a song less movement. African and African American theology has never been and will never be a song less theology."⁵⁰ His ministry during the civil rights movement was the personification of the liberating marriage. With his oratory skills King would turn every platform into a pulpit and the world into his congregation, always flanking the sermon with singers and musicians that would through their gifts invoke the spirit. Mahalia Jackson recalls one such experience:

With a truly exalted feeling I rose to sing. I'd thought long and hard about what was the right song for me to sing that day. It had been Martin Luther King who gave me the answer. When he heard me talking about it, he had said, "Mahalia, why don't you sing 'I Been 'Buked and I Been Scorned' for us?" There's probably only a few white people who have ever heard of that song, but it's an old spiritual that is known to colored people up and down the land... They said later my singing seemed to bounce off the golden dome of the Capitol far down the Mall and I've always hoped it reached inside to where some of those Congressmen were sitting! I had scarcely sat down and caught my breath when Martin Luther

⁵⁰ Otis Moss, "African American Music and the Freedom Movement" in *The African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications 2001).

King was on his feet delivering a speech that was to make him famous.⁵¹

The “I Have a Dream” speech, which it would be commonly known as was the personification of liberating content. Throughout the entire message the imagery was the escape from the systemic social and even spiritual struggle faced by Negroes in America. A struggle that was the testimony of Mahalia, captured in her singing the spiritual “I Been ‘Buked and I Been Scorned.” As his words bellowed across the world they brought liberation to people enslaved by the ignorance of others and they brought a sense of hope to those in despair. This is the genius of the black church and its most famous child, Dr. Martin Luther King, seen during the Civil Rights movement.

There was something in the sermons and the songs that gave hope; enough hope for people to march across a bridge knowing that there were dogs and hoses waiting on them. The theology of liberation rang loud in every refrain and every verse, in every homily and every whoop. The singers and the preachers really believed that “We Would Overcome Some Day.”

The Marriage

The intimate relationship of the spoken word and songs has been seen throughout the religious history of Black people in America. This was done through the rich oral tradition that was used to preserve many of the tenets of African culture, singing, dancing and preaching. The influence of music on preaching is paramount. However, the

⁵¹ Mahalia Jackson, “Singing of Good Tidings and Freedom” in *Afro-American Religious History A Documentary Witness*, edited by Milton C. Sernett (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

centrality of preaching in the Black worship experience is unmatched. The relationship of these two work as husband and wife, a team that is one.

It is more than church tradition that has a pastor ask for the common “A and B selection” before he/she is to minister. It is the depth of the inherent love for and affirmation of the surviving elements of African culture. Dubois said that it is virtually impossible to organize Black people without music. African Americans are a musical people but there is still something about preaching that draws this people. This is the relationship that is seen in the story telling of the songs used in worship, especially the liberation songs and double entendre meaning of the Slave Songs. This is seen in songs like “Couldn’t Hear Nobody Pray” or more modern gospel offerings like Kirk Franklin’s “Down by the Riverside” or Dietrick Haddon’s “Sinners Prayer.”

The most modern exhibition of this matrimony of sermon and song may be seen in a modified version of what is known as hip-hop or rap music. It embodies the spoken word over masterful polyrhythmic beats and samples of many popular forms of music. This genre is so popular among young people that it is definitely the hottest music since the Rock and Roll craze of the 1950’s but may also be more commanding due to its crossover appeal. This ghetto music has fans from the projects of Harlem to the palatial mansions of the Hills of Beverly. However, this music in its current state is not a truly liberating marriage of preaching and music because it lacks the element of liberation. It is truly a prophetic voice in that it does describe the social and societal ills as well as the injustices that are most times systemic against minorities. Yet it does not speak of what is next; it does not give a “how to” on the rising above the current condition. A gospel-

modified version of rap will certainly be one of the most creative personifications of the liberating marriage that the world has ever seen.

The greatest example of this wedded relationship is seen in the traditional tonal celebration of preaching at the end of the sermon. There are many ways that preachers celebrate their sermons but one of the most common ways in Black preaching is the whoop. The whoop, though described earlier as a part of preaching, probably best fits in the marriage of the two. Whooping usually crescendos and ends with a climax with the use of various clichés of liberation. Clichés of Liberation are common phrases that based on their familiarity with the hearers illicit memories of various experiences of God's liberation. The use of favorite scriptures is common; however the use of hymns is usually the most effective. These hymns and songs were what shaped theology in the early days of the Black church. Since these songs shaped the view of God, it is only fitting that they be used to affirm what the preacher is saying about God.

This is seen in the following conclusion of the investigating student's first sermon of the treatment "Like a Tree:"

Not only does a tree [like the blessed man in Psalm 1] change the environment, bear fruit in its season and not only can it weather the storm...but finally a tree is deeply rooted...Trees seem to have this thing right, they grow down before they shoot up...I was in Northern California last week and I was told of the famed Redwood trees. I am told that at the base many of these trees are large enough to have two lane roads built through them. I am also told that the roots of the trees go on for hundreds of miles...Every once in a while the root will run into a rock but instead of stopping growth the root wraps itself around the rock and holds on and if I can drop something in your spirit as I take my seat... We have a rock that we can hold onto, that rock is Jesus...My hope is Built on Nothing Less than Jesus Blood and Righteousness I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name, On Christ the Solid Rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.

The use of this song in the middle of this sermonic moment not only embodies the historic relationship of music and messages in the African-American church but also convincingly conveys the liberating content. It is clear to the hearer that Jesus, the chief character of the Gospel is the source of all hope.

Biblical Foundation

The premise and focus of this paper of course is to wed the sermons and songs of the Black church in a marriage of liberation. The chosen text of the researcher encapsulates this matrimony and is found in II Chronicles the twentieth chapter. It is an account of the battle between Jehoshaphat and the armies of Moab Ammon and Edom; however the focal passages for this treatment will be verses twenty through twenty-four:

On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and said "Listen to me all you people of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in his prophets, and you will succeed. After consulting the leaders of the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang: "Give thanks unto the Lord his faithful love endures forever!" At the moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir to start fighting among them. The armies of Moab and Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had finished off the army of Seir, they turned on each other. So when the army of Judah arrived at the lookout point in the wilderness, there were dead bodies lying on the ground for as far as they could see.⁵²

This passage contains The Liberating Marriage. The matrimony of sermon and song culminates in the liberation of the people of God. However it becomes immediately necessary that background information be provided in order that the entire impact of the

⁵² II Chron. 20:20-24, New Living Translation

awesomeness of God's liberating power contained in the sermons and songs of his people can be seen. At the beginning of chapter 17 of the second Book of the Chronicles the Bible records that the thirty-five year old prince, Jehoshaphat son of Asa, became the fourth king of the Judah.

Jehoshaphat

It is reported that the Lord was with the young king and that the king decided to walk in the ways of his father David. It should be noted that according to Acts 13:22, God considered David a man after God's heart and that this reference of Jehoshaphat is because of his commitment to the God of his father, David. The Lord was so moved by this commitment that the Lord established a kingdom under Jehoshaphat. As a result of this establishment this kingdom of different people and various nations came to pay tribute to Jehoshaphat.

Throughout the early years of his reign he had a burden for the education of the people about this God. He appointed a commission of princes, Levites and priests to go from city to city to instruct the people. Their instruction was to be based on the book of the law of Yahweh.

Wealthy and favored Jehoshaphat became very powerful. The eighteenth chapter reports that kings from other kingdoms brought him tribute and many kings desired to ally themselves with him. There was a fiasco in chapter nineteen that involved one such would be alliance with Ahab. However this episode was the plan of God.

Ahab sought to use a marital alliance with Jehoshaphat to secure the might and power of the Judean king's military forces. Jehoshaphat agreed but only after the Israelite leader consulted the Lord. Ahab had a few "yes prophets" who would tell him anything he paid them to say. Jehoshaphat, however, inquired of a prophet of the Lord. Much to the chagrin of Ahab the prophet Micaiah was summoned. Micaiah prophesied that Ahab would be murdered so Ahab disguised himself to avoid the judgmental prophesy of the Lord. By the end of the battle however the prophecy of the Lord was fulfilled thanks to a random arrow of an Aramean soldier that hit the disguised Ahab between the sections of his armor. Jehoshaphat returned safely to Judah.

There are conflicting reports about the destruction of the fleet of Jehoshaphat toward the end of his reign. However, it is clear that he was a great king who reigned for twenty-five years and died at the age of sixty. The most famous account of his reign is the episode in the twentieth chapter that is the subject of this research.

The Liberating Marriage

The investigation that is lifted by the research begins at the story's climax in the twentieth verse of the twentieth chapter a recapitulating waltz, however, through the narrative will acquaint all with the important intricacies in the account.

In the first verse of the chapter it is clear in most Bible versions who is attacking Judah, Moab and Ammon. The superscription at the beginning of the chapter in most translations concurs with the attackers in the first verse. However verse two, the very next verse, may cast a shadow upon the understanding of the reader in that the messengers

who disclose wartime intelligence to Jehoshaphat share, “A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea.” This report is fueled by the aid of Jehoshaphat knowing his geography. This would infer that not only did the Moabites and the Ammonites wage war but also the Edomites. To support this position, many translations include either the words Syria, the other side of the Sea or even the Dead Sea; however Edom is used by most scholars due to the later mention of Mount Seir which is in Edom. Historically these three kingdoms had trod different and yet not so different paths.

The Ammonites were a nomadic race of people that descended from the youngest daughter of Lot. “*The younger daughter also had a son and she named him Ben-Ammi, he is the father of the Ammonites today.*”⁵³ Less civilized than their cousins, the Moabites, the Ammonites would usually form leagues with other nations to fight against the more powerful Children of Israel. Politically they were governed by a king who was stationed in the capital city of Rabbah or Rabbah Ammon. Religiously the Ammonites worshipped the god Molech. The Ammonite women would eventually find their way into the Temple of Jerusalem as Solomon made it a practice of marrying Ammonite women as Rehoboam’s mother was an Ammonitess.

The elder cousins of the Ammonite people were the Moabites. “*The older daughter [of Lot] had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites today.*”⁵⁴ Though both of the nations started in the vicinity of Zoar, the nomadic Ammonites left the more peaceful Moabites who remained near their ancestral home. The relationship between Moab and Israel was one that enjoyed both the hots and colds of

⁵³ Gen. 19:36-38 New International Version of the Holy Bible

⁵⁴ Ibid.

war. In fact Jephthah emphasizes in Judges 11:25-26 that it had been 300 years of peace between Israel and Moab. However in this passage they come not as tercentennial allies but as foes. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh as their national deity.

Situated at the Southeastern border of Palestine was the nation of Edom. The inhabitants of this land were the descendants of Esau who expelled the original inhabitants, the Horites in Deuteronomy 2:12. They were governed by kings who were elected through a system of delegation had chiefs and sheikhs that were over clans and families. After the Edomites refused passage of the Israelites through their land in Numbers, due to bitterness that dated back to their father Esau's stolen birthright, they disappear from the Bible for roughly 400 years. When they resurface they are being defeated by Saul in I Samuel 14:47. The Edomites were part of the trilateral attack on Judah in this text.

So with the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir or Edom moving rapidly toward Jerusalem, what was Jehoshaphat prepared to do? The king sought the Lord and called a fast so that the people would seek the Lord. The resonation of the Jeremiah Wright quote of the passage in the Slave Narratives, "we sang our songs, we sang our sermons and we sang our reality" coupled with Wyatt Walker's assertion that the three most important elements in the Black church are prayer, sermons and song, looms in the ear of the researcher. The importance of prayer and fasting is an underrated essential in the quest for clarity in the dialogue between man and God. Jesus speaks to this when the Messiah states, "That some things only come through prayer and fasting."⁵⁵

The king led the people in a corporate prayer meeting in which he poured out his soul about the current state in which he, the nation and the people found themselves. This

⁵⁵ Mark 9:29, New Living Translation of The Holy Bible

was not a normal occurrence as it was not common for a royal to cry out to a power bigger or more powerful than his/herself especially with an audience. In fact, this was the argument of Michal the wife of David in II Samuel 6 when David danced before the Ark of the Lord in front of the commoners.

The prayer of the king on the behalf of the people moved the heart of God to response and it is reported that the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there while all of the men of Judah were standing with their families. This was a peculiar site as well, due to the fact that women were usually excluded from worship. When men cried out to the Lord most often women were not included; however in this account the king cried before the people both men and women. The Lord seeing the sincerity of the king and his subjects allowed the Spirit of the Lord to rest on Jehaziel the son of Zechariah.

It is safe to say that Jehaziel was a musician due to the fact that he was a Levite. Scholars have mixed opinions on whether or not he was a prophet or a musician with this lone prophetic moment. However the view that one either needs to be a musician or a prophet could not be African. It would be the argument of the researcher which is admittedly formed by Black liberation theology that the true nature of music, musicianship and the musician should always be prophetic. Historically its purpose has been to speak to and about the issue of suffering and the current state of affairs as well as process and the end result of liberation from the issue of suffering.

Jehaziel, probably a musician in the presence of the king and with the Presence of the Lord proclaimed:

Listen, King Jehoshaphat! Listen all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don't be

discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into Jeruel. But you will not even have to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out tomorrow, for the Lord is with you.⁵⁶

This sermon found rest in the heart of Jehoshaphat and he bowed to worship the Lord. The people seeing their leader worshiping, also fell and worshiped the Lord for the word he had given through Jehaziel. Jehaziel's words served as the backdrop for the liberation of the king.

It was with this freedom that Jehoshaphat arose early the next morning, before the people. In the mind of the researcher the king may not have even been able to sleep the night before, so he went out early with the people to confront their enemies in the wilderness of Tekoa ((te-ko'a; perhaps "trumpet clang"). This wilderness was located just outside the city of Tekoa, a town in Judah, about six miles South of Bethlehem and on the range of hills that rise near Hebron and stretch toward the Dead Sea. By the "wilderness of Tekoa" it must be understood to mean the adjacent region east of the town.

On the way the king stopped to preach. The sermonic spotlight was not shone upon him long however, the art of profundity rests in the hallway between the walls of brevity and relevance. His words were pregnant with profundity. He said, "Listen to me all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in His prophets and you will succeed."⁵⁶ This sermon from Jehoshaphat was one of liberation. It spoke of an anticipated outcome of victory because of a belief in a God who is concerned about the welfare of His people.

⁵⁶ II Chron. 20:20, King James Version

It was a far cry from the feelings of the King on the day before; then being an anxious king, Jehoshaphat prayed for God to restore his faith. However today he was a preacher, preaching a gospel of liberation to a people who faced an oncoming enemy. He told the people of the outcome he expected based on what God had said and done before. This is the whole of the gospel message that brings liberation to the African-American churchgoer week after week. That God will bring God's people out based on what God has said and done previously. This is the expected outcome based on the experienced outcomes that give the basis for the hope in the liberating power of the God in the message.

Jehoshaphat not only spoke the message of liberation he commissioned the music of liberation. The Bible says that, "After consulting the leaders of the people the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising Him for His holy splendor."

It is the belief of the investigating student that true liberation is comprised of both messages and music. This premise is seen here in the text. The king had preached a liberating word but the liberation was not complete. Wyatt Walker suggested earlier that music and preaching have gone hand in hand to create what Dubois called, frenzy, in the historic Black church. In this account because of the king's sermonic moment and the singing of the Levites who were crying aloud "Give thanks unto the Lord, His mercy endureth forever"⁵⁷, frenzy like no other was created. The text declares:

At the moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting amongst themselves. The armies of Moab and Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had finished off the

⁵⁷ Ps. 136, King James Version

army of Seir, they turned on each other. So when the army of Judah arrived at the lookout point in the wilderness, there were dead bodies lying on the ground for as far as they could see. Not a single one of the enemy had escaped.

Because of praise and worship in the form of singing that followed the king's sermon the battle was won without even fighting. The battle was not won with the message of liberation alone but the damage was done to the enemy when the combination of sermons and songs of liberation commenced. Though the battle had not been fought and there was not yet an experienced outcome, Jehoshaphat sent the Levites to praise in the anticipation of the outcome.

Both of the ministries of the spoken word through preaching and the ministry of music have been a tradition of the Black church that has given African-American's hope for centuries. However the greatest power seems not to have been in one or the other nor is it in one over the other. But the true power of liberation in the African-American church has come through a synthesis of them both called, "The Liberating Marriage."

Theological Foundation

Within the confines of this project the overarching theme has been a theology of liberation and hope found in the sermons and songs of the historic African-American church. Though there are many views on liberation theology and in many instances those views overlap the view of Black Liberation Theology, what Africans in North America developed is paramount in this project. The term Black Theology coined in the mid 1960's by The National Committee of Black Churchmen is defined as such:

Black Theology is a theology of Black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is

commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression.⁵⁸

This statement is one that in the eye of the researcher only gives language to the practical theology of the Black church since the brush harbor meetings of the invisible institution. Liberation theology has a much further reach than Black theology, the subject of this project; it encompasses Womanist theology, African theology, Asian theology, and Latin/Caribbean theology. All of these theologies are important. Though striving to overcome contextual issues through the use of the transformative power of the gospel is their commonality; what is more important for this brief treatment concerning these theologies is where they are different.

Womanist theology by title would infer the existence of a worldview concerned with the equal representation of women before God. However the intellectual developments and points of contention of these brilliant scholars are fascinating. “Having the negative experiences of”, as Dwight Hopkins says, “black women when they confront both the racism of white feminists and white male theologians as well as the sexism of black and white theologians.” Yet because of the gospel these women find hope and liberation. Yet it is one that is slightly different than the whole of the Black church

In contrast to the first and second generation (male) writers, womanists have held together consistently issues of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and, to a certain degree, ecology. Differing from white feminists and black male theologians, womanists’ primary theological norm is how the spirit of liberation

⁵⁸ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume One: 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1979).

shows itself in all the parts of black women's and the entire African American experience.⁵⁹

In the spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer, noted Christian scholar and woman's rights activist, the modern day womanists are a sorority and fraternity of sisters who are committed to tearing down all strongholds and stereotypes that were and are used to hold women back.

The theologies of the third world such as Latin/Caribbean, Asian and African also have both similarities and differences in their worldview when compared to Black Liberation theology. African theology like Black theology offers a revolutionary edge to the distorted belief system of racist Christianity as well as the commitment to hold on to tenets of African culture and not to be absorbed by European culture in order to become a follower of Christ. The most important difference is that in America, Black Theology is developed from the perspective of a minority people while in Africa the theology is developed through the eyes of a people who are in the majority. "Black theology in the United States asks the question: What does God have to do with my blackness as a minority in a system of white supremacy? African theology poses the question: As a majority population with a vast indigenous culture, language and religion, how can I accept Christianity through my own indigenous culture?"⁶⁰

With Latin/Caribbean theology the major difference is the view of class. Latin and Caribbean theologians see it as a struggle and a matter of class exploitation, while in Black theology it is a racial issue of equal access to socioeconomic power.

⁵⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

When addressing his view of the theological landscape in Asia James Cone had this to say:

In Japan, it was not difficult to perceive the similarities between the Korean experience in that country and the black experience in the United States. As black were stolen from Africa by Europeans and enslaved in the Americas, Koreans were taken against their will from their homeland and brought to Japan in order to serve Japanese people. Like blacks who expressed their struggle for justice by creating songs of liberation derived from the biblical account of the Exodus, Korean Christians in Japan expressed their determination in similar fashion. As blacks experience discrimination in employment and in every other aspect of American society, Koreans have an analogous experience in Japan.⁶¹

The theology that is born from the labor pain type of oppression is either one that conforms to subjugation, or it is one that struggles for liberation. In both the case of the Korean in Japan and the African in America the gospel provides the needed liberating content that frees one from bondage.

The whole of the African American church experience has been the liberation of the Black people. Once again borrowing the words of Dr. Frank Anthony Thomas “the whole of the Black [preaching] experience has been about the reconstruction of the Black Identity and the liberation of Black people.” It must be hastily noted that since the experience of lost identity and discrimination were not individual but corporate plagues, the liberating cure for them was not to be individual but shared.

In this scheme of things, individualism was a sin, individuality was a cherished goal. In other words, in the African worldview, one left the human level and sank to a lower form whenever one acted to benefit primarily oneself. A human being could only pursue her or his strengths and visions as long as they served the communal well-being. In radical distinction to certain European notions (e.g. “I think therefore I am- a notion that focuses on the self and opens

⁶¹ James H. Cone, “A Black American Perspective on the Asian Search for a Humanity,” in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed. Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 179.

the way toward cut-throat competition for individual gain), Africans lived out an “I am because we are” style of life (a basis for a healthy collectivity that included the interests and needs of society’s most marginalized).⁶²

The theology of the Black church was originally about the liberation of the entire people from slavery but as time progressed it evolved to focus on deliverance from socio economic, institutional and system discrimination and racism. This is seen in the both the music and the messages noted earlier. Singing was a communal activity; everyone sang. It drew people together as a chord of love. The listening to the story of the griot or preacher was a communal activity. One of the greatest achievements of the church was to offer community in the midst of confusion.

As Hopkins noted this is a far cry from the Eurocentric Cartesian view of thinking oneself into being without concern for the larger community. What then, the question might arise, is the major difference between the two theologies? What is the factor that makes the Black theology so focused on communal liberation while the mainstream theologies focus on individual thinking? Why does it seem that based on theology Black people and White people serve different Gods? It is the contention of the investigating student that the major difference is the profound presence and purpose of hope in Black Theology. At this moment the words of Tite Tienou, Academic Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois ring in the ears of the researcher. He stated that prayer precedes creed which precedes prayer. This statement was interpreted to mean that one’s practice or worship influences one’s belief and the belief that one has influences their prayer.

⁶² Dwight Hopkins, quoting John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* in *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999).

The historic belief of European Christians that influenced their theology is that God is “Holy Other” or Transcendent. This is to say that God is so holy that it is impossible that God is made of the same substance as and to coexist with man. However what God is made of and where exactly God is, is unknown and is given the term “other”. This in the Eurocentric view of God many times reduces the move of God to matters of the soul. In the Africentric view of God, God’s Transcendence is celebrated as well as God’s Imminence. Black Theological thought accepts that God is made of holy material and exists in places that man cannot see yet the provision of hope is that God is concerned and connected to our everyday life. God is the self existent creator God who is holy and ruler over all (Transcendence), yet God is loving, compassionate and desires to and does have relationship with humankind (Imminence). This is seen in the following story.

While facilitating a class on the history of the African-American church, the investigating student was trying to explain a paraphrased statement of a scholar, James Cone who said, “The God of the slave is different from the God of the slave master.” The student told the class that the meaning of this was saying that Black people and white people serve different Gods. Met with much resistance the student describe two missionaries, one of African decent the other of European decent, visiting prison cell mates. The white missionary prayed for the soul of the inmate while the black inmate prayed about the bars.

The prayer of the white missionary was devoid of the hope that God could help the current situation here though God could fix it in the afterlife; while the prayer of the Black missionary proved to be endowed with a hope that God was able to fix the current

situation, now. This hope is the anticipation of an expected Godly end to whatever the situation maybe. This was the belief of the slave and “such an expectation of the finality of justice gave slaves hope in a future that would be theirs. Hope helped the poor to keep on struggling because God would take care of them through trials and tribulations.”⁶³

This type of belief system and practice that was fostered in the invisible institution created what Hopkins called a “folk theological wisdom” that still exists today. He states,

Most slaves knew, for example, what “God may not come when you call Him but He’s right on time” meant. For them, the divinity was a time-God who operated time... somehow and some way God appeared “on time” to ease your troubled mind, lift you up on every leaning side and help you climb the rough side of the mountain. It was this time-God who “made a way out of no way.”⁶⁴

Again this is in stark contrast to the Eurocentric belief system. In fact Dwight Perry argues that an end result of the influence of European theology on White Christianity is a separation between theology that is thought and believed and theology that is practiced. Perry argues:

A dichotomy between faith and practice never developed with the context of the Black church, because the church played a central role in the freedom of its people from the degradation of slavery. The Black church had to develop a holistic perspective on what the gospel means to everyday life to help its members cope with the anathema of being Black in White America. The White church in this country developed in the absence of oppression; it could afford to dichotomize the gospel, allowing it to apply to spiritual issues and not social ones.⁶⁵

If this is true, it clearly explains why there were and still are many Klansmen, during the reign of terror of the Ku Klux Klan who were and are deacons and preachers

⁶³ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁵ Dwight Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers: A Black Evangelical Explains the Black Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 20.

in their churches. Their theology and belief in God were not connected to their behavior or practice. Such may be even the case today. As the country investigates the recent preemptive war it is becoming hard to justify these actions with the will of the God whom we say we “trust”. The ability to do this is in the separation of what we believe and what we do.

This is what fuels the dichotomy or struggle for identity that is inherent to Black people in America as described by Dubois years ago. He called it the “phenomenology of consciousness” or double consciousness. This described both the plight and potential of the African in America; they were “two struggling souls in one dark body”. There has always been an inner struggle for identity among Blacks in America; a struggle that is eased by the God of the Black church.

Again the question is asked so eloquently by Dr. Frank Thomas, “when one has to deal with such loss and grief as the Africans when coming to this place, how do they do it?” He quickly answered, “They sang *and preached* (emphasis added).” This is the whole of a practical theology for the African American Church; they sang and preached. Sown within the songs and the sermon was enough experience of previous outcomes which prompted praise or so much faith in an anticipated outcome that one is able to praise before the outcome gets here. The church provided hope to the people and the vehicle through which this hope was shared was the marriage of sermon and song. The liberating content brought by the song served as the runway for the uplift brought by the Word of God.

The relationship of sermons and songs acts as a marriage. They work with each other ultimately for the good of the relationship however oft times they fall out and argue.

When they fall out and argue then the liberating power of this theological construct is worked against. It is the goal of this project that the liberation theology that is distinctly African American will be noted for its richness, depth as well as its unwavering belief that, "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow."

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The method of testing the hypothesis of this project was a two-pronged approach that consisted of a synthesis between qualitative and quantitative research. This method hoped to locate the liberating material in the sermons and songs of this church's worship services, if any, and measure its efficaciousness in the lives of the people. The research will unfold on the following two levels:

Level One: Quantitative Research

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(2 blank lines)*

The investigating student met with the Context Associates and constructed a pre/post survey in the Likert format. The Likert survey was chosen because it is simple to administer and the results are unbiased. Each test had ten questions on it with a total of eleven inquiries. This was possible because the first and the eleventh question were the same. The researcher, along with the context associates, administered the pre-test and calculated each response using a percentile measurement tool. The pre test assessment data was documented to be compared to the post test data to measure attitudinal changes in the parishioners. Between the tests the student preached a five sermon series during the regular Wednesday worship services. The average attendance/survey ratio of all services during the five weeks constituted the quantitative number used in measuring the responses. This method was used in deciding the percentages of the church feels that the songs, the sermons or both give them a sense of hope and liberation.

Level Two: Qualitative Research

In the same initial meeting discussed in the previous section the investigating student asked each of associates to contact four members of the church at large to form a core study group of sixteen. This group was a cross section of the church varying in age, background, position and length of service. The associates identified the core group and allow them to take the survey and listen to the sermons with the membership at large. After the sermon series the core group was contacted and two group meetings were set up. During the first group meeting the project was explained and the group found out that they were a cross-section of the church population that was being used for qualitative research in a Doctor of Ministry project. They were asked to take the survey once again affixing their name to it. They then listened to a CD that included seven to ten minutes of each of the five sermons in the sermon series and subsequently interviewed.

The group then met corporately to dialogue again with the investigating student and the context associates. This method was used to qualify many of the things that will be said by the congregation at large during the survey.

The dialogical meetings coupled with the personal interviews hope to define what certain segments of the congregational thought. The contextual associates selected a true cross section of the parishioners so that the entire church was represented.

The Sermon and Song Series

It was the task of the student to provide preaching on Wednesday nights during the sabbatical of the Senior Pastor. This time was used to conduct the project. During this time the Minister of Music of the church agreed to provide complimentary music that will accent the preaching moment in both genre and text. The five-week sermon and song series called “Preaching in the Psalms” focused on various feelings experienced in church as well as community from which people need to be liberated.

Some of these feelings were guilt, low self-esteem, jealousy, lack of direction, fear, lack of purpose etc. The series was conducted from July 2002 until August 2003. The entire manuscripts of the five sermons that were preached along with the musical selections that preceded the sermon, called the “Song of Preparation” and the song that followed the sermon called the “Song of Invitation” are found in the Appendixes.

Following the sermon and song series the methodology will be followed as detailed earlier in the paper. The researching student and context associates will contact the small study group as well as conduct the post test.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS OF THE MODEL

The hypothesis of this project is that the relationship that exists between the sermons and songs of the African-American church acts as a marriage to bring liberation to its parishioners. The research itinerary detailed in the Methodology portion of this project has yielded the following results which supported this premise. Again the researcher admits that one form of research Quantitative or Qualitative alone would reveal insufficient results therefore both forms were used.

On July 31, 2002 the Likert survey pre tests were distributed by the context associates and on September 7, 2002 the post test was distributed. There were four context associates that represented the Pastoral Staff; Christian Education; Music; Youth; and Worship. Just before the preaching moment it was explained to the parishioners that results of the surveys turned in would be used in a Doctor of Ministry study. Of the 500 surveys distributed 75% were submitted as part of the study.

Over the five weeks the researcher preached the five sermons: "Like a Tree"; "A Desire to be Desired"; "Reclaiming Home field Advantage"; "The Good and Pleasant Church"; and "No More Excuses." On September 4, 2002, the parishioners were given the post test.

The pre tests and post tests were made up of the same ten questions. Each survey however included eleven inquiries; this was possible due to the first and eleventh questions being identical.

The pre tests and post tests were made up of the same ten questions. Each survey however included eleven inquiries; this was possible due to the first and eleventh questions being identical.

During the five week series the weekly attendance increased, which without keeping track of who submitted a pretest could have been a research catastrophe. However with the institution of a second form of research this allowed the randomness of the quantitative method to work for the good of the project. Of the 600 survey distributed on the last night 66% were returned. This created a disparity of 9% or roughly 100 people not including those who came during the weeks where no test was given.

The researcher and the context associates decided to base quantitative results on the 300 surveys of both the pre test and post test. This number was determined by the average attendance as reported from the ushers/counters over the five-week period of time. The results of the quantitative research of The Liberating Marriage are as follows:

The first inquiry was “The worship service at MBCC is a station of hope in your Life?” On the pre test 60 % of the parishioners either strongly agreed or agreed, while 80% agreed after the treatment; a 20% increase.

The second inquiry was “The worship service at MBCC is a station of hope in the Midtown community? On the pre test 40% agreed while on the post test 55% agreed; a 15% increase.

The third inquiry was “Preaching and singing are central to the worship experience at MBCC?” 70% agreed with this statement during the pre test and 85% agreed during the post test; a 15% increase.

The fourth question asked “The songs offered at MBCC give me a sense of hope?” On the pre test 60% agreed while on the post test 85% concurred; a 25% increase.

The fifth question was “The songs offered at MBCC contain liberating words?” The results of this inquiry were puzzling because they were strikingly low compared to the last question posed. In the pre test 30% agreed while 50% agreed after the post test; a 20% increase.

The sixth question posed was “The sermons offered at MBCC contain liberating words?” 60% agreed prior to the treatment while 85% after the preaching series a 25% increase.

The seventh statement of investigation was “The sermons offered at MBCC give you a sense of hope?” During the pre test 70% answered in the affirmative while by the time of the post test 90% agreed; a 20% increase.

The eighth question asked was “The songs and sermons at MBCC clearly work together to give you hope?” 30% answered in the affirmative during the pre test while 87% concurred at the conclusion of the treatment; a whopping 57% increase.

The ninth question was “The songs prepare you for preaching ministry?” The same 30% agreed during the pre test while after the treatment 85% agreed; a 57% increase.

The tenth question was “The worship experience builds to a crescendo or climax with the preaching ministry?” 65% agreed during the pre test and 95% agreed after the preaching series; a 30% increase.

The eleventh question being the same as the first was “The worship service at MBCC is a station of hope in your life?” Surprisingly the result differed though not

much. 55% during the pre test while 87% agreed following the treatment; a confusing 37% increase.

The results of the qualitative piece were a bit more interesting due to the fact that personal interviews were set up from the focus and conducted.

Prior to the treatment when asked about the worship experience of the church only a small number viewed it as being a liberating experience. However during the time of the interviews that followed the treatment there was an overwhelming rise in support of the hypothesis of the investigating student.

However the support was in no means uncontested. There seemed to be a slight dichotomy between the way things have been done traditionally at the church and the way things are seemingly headed.

Some of the comments were as follows: one of the context associates recounted “The use of personal testimony made the sermon fit into the lives of the people.” One of the members of the Worship Commission commented that “The sermons were related to the social condition for most of the people here as a result the hope of the gospel gave hope to the people.” One of the youth leaders said, “The preacher spoke to me in a language that I can understand; all we needed was some rap music and it would have been “cronk” up in here!” Again all of the comments were not positive for one of the more experienced or seasoned members of the group questioned the lack of hymns used in the project as opposed to the use of praise and worship and contemporary gospel.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the Liberating Marriage the researcher hypothesized that the sermons and songs of the African American church when used together provides a liberating hope to the congregants. Through the five week treatment of hope-filled preaching and singing the research data shows that the people of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian church felt a strong sense of liberation. This liberation was not based on the preaching alone nor was it based on the musical selections alone but it was the culmination of the marriage of the sermon and the song.

It however must be stated that though this project successfully proved the hypothesis it was not without its limitations. Anyone that seeks to duplicate this model of ministry must be aware of its strengths and limitations as well as the researcher's suggestions for similar future projects and/or models.

Strengths

The most important strength of this model is the working relationship presupposed between the preacher and the musician. This is a relationship that is reported strained by many practicing pastors and ministers of music however a good working relationship is essential to the success of the project. The preaching minister and the music minister provide the "bride and groom" of the Liberating Marriage. This relationship will stretch the preacher and musician both theologically and professionally. Another significant strength to this model of ministry is the educational value to the members of the congregation. When preaching hope to African Americans it is

impossible not to speak historically and theologically. Much of this information may be unknown to the parishioner. Furthermore some of the genres of music that will be explored similar hymn, anthems, spirituals etc. will in itself be an education of the highest order.

Limitations

In this particular treatment there were no measures that assured control. There was no way to assure that the same people were treated during the five-week process. As a result the quantitative and qualitative methods did not carry the same amount of research merit. It is also imperative for future models of ministry that seek to marry music and preaching to take into account the personal attitudes of the parishioners that may seek to taint the research results. Personal attitudes proved to be a small limitation to the progress of this project.

Suggestions

If one aspires to duplicate this model they must find a way to maintain control of the sample. Also to control the prejudices, one might conduct a pre treatment interview of the members of those selected to be a part of the focus groups.

In this project it has been suggested, historically, biblically and theologically, that liberation is not new to the African-American church, nor is it something that is a passing trend. But it is inherent to the way that the African in America views God. It is this view of God coupled with an experience of God's sustaining power that leads to the hope of liberation.

Conclusion

As a result it is the conclusion of the investigating student that the hypothesis of this project is true of this particular context. At the close of the treatment both the quantitative and qualitative showed that when music and preaching functioned in relationship and liberation was brought to the congregation of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church.

APPENDIX A
SONGS OF THE LIBERATING MARRIAGE

BLESSED IS THE MAN (Hymn of Preparation for “Like A Tree”)

Jane Marshall

Blessed, is the man, who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the way of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
But His delight is in the law of the Lord,
In the law of the Lord, and on His law
He meditates day and night.

He is like a tree, is like a tree,
A tree planted, planted by streams of water,
He is like a tree, is like a tree,
A tree planted by streams, by streams of water.

TREES (Song of Invitation for “Like A Tree”)

Margaret Dureaux

Trees don't want to be mountains. They just praise the Lord.
Mountains never are valleys. They just praise the Lord.
The sun, moon, and stars are happy in their heavenly space.
The rivers and the oceans just keep moving from place to place.

Trees don't want to be clouds. They just praise the Lord.
Dark clouds never are sunny. They just praise the Lord.
A grain of sand is happy sitting on a cool Seashore,
Or even in the hottest place making a Desert's Floor.
So If I want to be servant of the One Who made the trees,
I want to live the life God wants me to live.

HE'S BEEN FAITHFUL (Hymn of Preparation for “A Desire to be Desired”)

Carol Cymbala

In my moments of fear, through every pain, ev'ry tear,
There's a God who's been faithful to me.
When my strength was all gone, when my heart had no song,
Still in love He's proved faithful to me.
Ev'ry word He's promised is true;
What I thought was impossible I see my God do

He's been faithful, faithful to me,
Looking back His love and mercy I see.
Though in my heart I have questioned,
Even failed to believe yet,
He's been faithful, faithful to me.

When my heart looked away, the many times I could not pray,

Still my God He was faithful to me.
 The days I spent so selfishly, reaching out for what pleased me;
 Even then God was faithful to me.
 Ev'ry time I come back to Him,
 He is waiting with open arms and I see once again.

He's been faithful, faithful to me,
 Looking back His love and mercy I see.
 Though in my heart I have questioned,
 Even failed to believe yet,
 He's been faithful, faithful.
 In my heart I have questioned,
 Even failed to believe yet,
 He's been faithful, faithful to me.
 He's been so faithful, faithful to me.

LET MY LIFE PRAISE YOU (Song of Invitation for "A Desire to be Desired")

Elizabeth Goodine

Praise You, praise You, praise you,
 Let my life praise You;
 Praise You, praise You,
 Let my life O Lord Praise You.

GIVE ME JESUS (Hymn of Preparation for "Reclaiming Home field Advantage")
Hall Johnson

In de morn-in' when I rise,
 In de morn-in' when I rise,
 In de morn-in' when I rise, give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 You may have all dis worl',
 Give me Jesus.

Dark midnight was my cry,
 Dark midnight was my cry,
 Dark midnight was my cry, give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 You may have all dis worl',
 Give me Jesus.

Just about de break of day,
 Just about de break of day,

Just about de break of day, give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 Give me Jesus.
 You may have all dis worl',
 Give me Jesus.

HE'S GOD (Song of Invitation for "Reclaiming Home field Advantage")

Edwin Hawkins

When I come into His presence, I humble myself
 Lift up both my hands, and I begin to praise Him
 I'll praise Him

When I come into His presence, I humble myself.
 Remembering what He's done. The victory is won.
 I'll worship Him
 I'll worship Him
 For all He's done for me. Redeemed and set me free.
 And because, just because He's

God, my God
 God, God, my God.
 For all He's done for me
 Redeemed and set me free
 And because, just because He's God

LET THE CHURCH BE THE CHURCH

(Hymn of Preparation for "The Good and Pleasant Church")

Let the church be the church.
 Let the people rejoice.
 For we've settled the question,
 And we've made our choice.
 Let the anthem ring out,
 From the victory's scale,
 For the church triumphant is alive and well.

VAMP:

For the Church triumphant (repeat as needed)
 This Church triumphant
 God's Church triumphant
 Is alive
 Is alive

Is alive
And well

DWELL IN UNITY

Pamela J. Davis

(Song of Invitation for the “*The Good and Pleasant Church*”)

Behold how good and pleasant it is,
For brethren to dwell in unity
Behold how good and pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell in unity.
It’s good, so good
To fellowship; it’s good.
Good, so good,
For brethren to dwell in unity

PRAISE YE, THE LORD (Hymn of Preparation for “*No More Excuses*”)

A Randdeger

Praise Ye the Lord,
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in the firmament of His power.
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet.
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise Him with timbrel and dance.
Praise Him with stringed instruments and organs.
Praise Him upon the loud cymbals
Praise Him upon the high sounding cymbals.
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord
Praise Ye the Lord!

REDEEMED PRAISE (Song of Invitation for “*No More Excuses*”)

V. Michael McKay

If You had not saved me,
I don’t know where I would be.
Through storm clouds,
Through dark clouds,
The Son will always shine through.
I’m grateful, so grateful;
I’m grateful, Master to You.

APPENDIX B
SERMONS OF THE LIBERATING MARRIAGE

“A Desire to Be Desired”

Psalm 51:14-17

(14) Save me from bloodguilt O God, the God who saves me and my tongue will sing of your righteousness (15) O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. (16) You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise.

*I was in the fifth grade and I was at the top of my class
Number one in spelling and English and number two in math and science
I was doing well
But then he handed me the Rubik's cube*

*I began to manipulate the faddish game and quickly yelled out I got two
She came over and confiscated the toy and said that's enough
She said that I was being a class disruption and
She began to write a note*

*She was absolutely right
Her name was Mrs. Johnson and she was absolutely right
I had disrupted the class
As a result on the way home I was carrying a note that said
I had messed up
A note that furthermore required a parental signature*

*When I got home I quickly ran into my father
This was unusual because my father was never home
My mother was a homemaker or back then a housewife
But she was out of town*

*He asked me how was school I said everything was fine
I went to my room and after plotting signed the note from Mrs. Johnson myself
I returned to the dinner table and greeted my father with
A kiss on the cheek as if everything was fine yet I knew
That kiss was one of betrayal, betrayal and sin against my father
Similar to the kiss that Judas gave Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane*

*I returned the next day to school and handed the note to Mrs. Johnson
She quickly assessed that it had been forged
Not that she was psychic but because it was written in pencil
And had been erased twice*

*She asked me had my father seen it
I said he had so she wrote another note and stapled the first note to it
Then she handed me the second note*

*I took it home feeling like the worst kid in the history of family
 I greeted my father remember mom was out of town
 He was so excited to see me I was his son
 As he smiled at me and the guilt of my actions forced my head down in shame
 I knew in my heart I was no longer worthy of his affections
 I knew that I had brought dishonor to his name and his smile for me
 That symbolized the very desire he had to be my father and to have me as his son
 I had brought shame to*

*So reluctantly I handed him the note/the note that said I had betrayed his confidence
 A note that said that I had misused his name
 A note that was proof of a sin that I had committed
 That went against everything he stood for
 And everything he had taught me*

*After he read it he look at me and with tears in his eyes and a frown on his face
 He said it's OK now get ready for dinner
 At that moment I felt that things had changed
 I mean the love and desire that he felt for me was gone
 At that moment I felt alone
 At that moment I felt that the relationship was over
 At that moment I felt the desire to once again be desired*

*Wow that is a tough feeling
 I mean the feeling of longing to be where you used to be
 Have you ever been there?
 I mean know you that you were doing well and because of one decision
 You feel as if now you are all by yourself
 The feeling of desire to have what once was*

*The way I am using desire in this sermon is somewhat different
 Than the normal way it is used
 This desire is not of a sexual nature yet it does include passion
 It deals with a passionate intimacy that is not sexual*

*It simply deals with wanting to be close to something that you think is worth being close
 to
 And having that something think you are worth it too
 I again am not talking about physical relationship
 But I am speaking of deep love and intimacy*

*You see my father desired to be my father and I desired to be his son
 But I also desired him to want to be my father and I believe
 He desired me to want to be his son
 Yet my actions in my mind some how fractured this arrangement*

*He could not possibly still desire me and I was left longing for that
I desired to be desired again
Even though that was over twenty years ago I can still feel the hole
In my heart / the pain of that desire
In my throat I can still feel the lump*

*The desire to once again be desired
I believe it somehow parallels the feeling of David as he penned this text*

*Now it becomes immediately imperative that I lay the groundwork for this text
If you look at the superscription before the first verse you will see
Two very important elements*

*You will find out who wrote the Psalm as well as what was going on in his life
David wrote roughly 73 Psalms and thirteen of them tell us what was going on in his life
This one tells us that Nathan the prophet of the Lord came to him after he had gone to
Bathsheba*

*Now for those of you that want the story of what happened in its entirety
You may read it in the 11th and 12th chapters of II Samuel
But I will give you an overview just for the sake of time*

*It was the springtime when all of the Kings usually go to war
But David was chillin' in his palace
He had sent his general to go fight the other Kings
That was his first problem/he sent someone else to do what God called Him to do*

*The second problem that David encountered was that all of the men were at war
And he is in the palace
He couldn't sleep and decided to walk on the palace roof*

*There was a woman naked taking a bath on her roof or her balcony
Now this is when the story gets interesting
I preach this in a sermon called Jerry Springer in Jerusalem
Now he starts to observe the woman on the roof taking a bath
All of the men except David and a few of his servants are at war*

*Now first of all I believe she had to be fine
David was the king had a lot of women
Because he had a lot of money he probably had his pick of women
He had the prettiest the best built and the smartest
But this woman has something
That evidently blew his mind*

So I since he did not know her it must have been looks and physique

*So he is watching
 Now here is my question
 Cause we know David is watching/the text does not say how long he watched
 But my question is did she know David was watching
 Did Bathsheba know he was looking/If so she covered up
 I mean we always dog David but did she know
 I mean as TLC sings in one of their songs
 Girls talk about the booty too*

*C'mon now/ This is the King / A good-looking King/ ladies man/ women make up songs
 about him
 He was a warrior
 One who took very good care of his wives/ and all of the woman that were lucky enough
 To meet his acquaintance
 Did she know he was looking/ if so did she cover up?*

*Anyway after watching her he asks his boys about her and they said
 Naw Dawg she married to Uriah he from Harrisburg*

*He said bring her to me
 They slept together and she got pregnant
 He plots to cover up his sin-don't we try to cover up our stuff to
 He then brings Uriah from the war and tells him to go home
 Take some leave because he was such a wonderful soldier
 David was of course hoping that Uriah would go home and be with his wife
 Get her pregnant and therefore clear him as the Baby Daddy*

*Uriah does not go home because of his loyalty to the King
 But instead goes to the barracks
 When David hears about he throws a party and gets him drunk
 Thinking that surely a drunk man who has a wife that he has not seen
 Will go home and be with her*

*Uriah still will not go but again spend the night with the other soldiers
 David becomes enraged and sends Uriah with a note to Joab, the General of David's
 Army
 The note told Joab to send Uriah to the front line
 And report to him when he had been killed*

*Needless to say Uriah was killed
 David married Bathsheba and the baby was born*

Soon after Nathan the prophet showed up and told a story

The story was about two men with sheep

*One had many the other only one
 The one who had many killed the other man's one
 In order to have a party instead of killing one of his
 David was upset and told the prophet that this was unacceptable*

*That whoever this man was deserved to die because of his arrogance and his selfishness
 Nathan said that you are the man and God ain't pleased with that mess
 God said I gave you everything and if it was not enough
 I would have given you more but you have done
 Things against who I am
 God spelled out some things that now he would take from David*

*David said to the prophet, I have sinned
 And the prophet said in the 13th verse of chapter 12
 God has taken your sin but David was still hurt
 The baby died at seven days old,
 The Bible said that David worshipped but he still was hurt*

*He had messed up
 He had let God down
 A God that desired to be David's God
 For God called David a man after His own heart
 A God that desired David to be His son
 David felt alone
 He felt that his actions somehow separated him from God
 I believe that David just like I felt in 5th grade
 And just like many of us feel from time to time and maybe even tonight
 Desired to once again himself be desired by God*

*In David's despair he took out his pen and wrote this Psalm
 The Psalm in its entirety is wonderfully written
 However I think that a few verses are tailored to teach us
 Some important truths
 Let's look at verses 14-17*

*David who had called God his shepherd and his light
 Who said that he would bless God at all time is now asking for
 Forgiveness from bloodguilt*

*The exegetical reason he is asking this is because there was no
 Question of his guilt he knew that he was guilty
 And furthermore he knew that God knew he was guilty
 He was guilty of lust that turned into adultery
 Adultery that turned into deception
 And deception that turned into murder*

*The blood of Uriah that he ordered to be shed
 Demanded a payment of his blood and according to the law
 Only a Sovereign could grant clemency*

*He also says that God would not accept sacrifices of rams and bulls
 The reason that David wrote this was because in the Hebrew Law
 There was not sacrifice that could atone for adultery and murder
 Both of these offences were punishable by death*

*Why? Murder is an offense against the sovereignty of God
 God is the only Creator of life Elohim and therefore the only one who
 Has the power to end it*

*Adultery is an offense against the first institution of God, marriage
 God gave us marriage to help us understand divine intimacy with Him.
 So there was no all-atoning sacrifice for these infractions*

*David said but there is one thing that you will not despise
 I need to give it to you because I cannot take the guilt anymore
 There is one thing that you want and that you will not turn your back*

*Even to an adulterer
 One thing that you will honor
 Even from a murderer
 Even from a liar
 Even from one addicted to drugs, alcohol or pornography
 One thing that you will get your ear
 One thing that you love to hear
 Even from the woman who sells her body for money or drugs on the street
 Or from the women who sells her body for drinks and a ride in a nice car at
 The Elks Club*

*There is one thing that God seeks or desires as one translation says
 And that is a broken spirit and a contrite heart*

*Broken spirit -means to be crushed beyond recognition
 Contrite - means deeply sorry beyond recourse*

*Let me bring it closer
 It means that I desire to be back in good graces with Him so bad
 That it does not matter who is looking
 I am so sorry that I messed up that I don't even have an excuse*

*I messed up and I am broken
 I won't give her flowers to smooth over the fact
 That I hit her and call her out of her name*

*I messed up and I am contrite
I won't try to give him my body instead of an apology
When I dog him out at the beauty shop*

*I messed up
I won't try to put extra offering in
Just to clear my conscience*

*I messed up
I won't try to do 3 hallelujahs
And one thank you Jesus just to feel better*

I messed up and I am broken, I am crushed, I am contrite, and I am sorry

*The good news of this sermon is that God does honor you if you are broken and contrite
He will not honor you if you are prideful and puffed up*

1. **Bowed Head**

- *Giving honor to His Majesty*
- *Recognition of His Holiness*
- *Recognition of shame associated with sin*
- *Prayer to Him that can forgive*

2. **Bent Knees**

- *The ultimate sign of humility*
- *A man on his knees is vulnerable*
- *No leverage/ no balance*
- *Must trust those around him or her*

1. **Lifted Hands**

- *Sign of surrender*
- *Open*
- *Unprotected My daughter Taylor*
- *I need help I don't know*

God will not turn away if you (Demonstrate)

Wait a minute that looks familiar

*Oh yea I remember it was Jesus
When we have a broken spirit and a contrite heart we remind God of Jesus*

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross
The emblem of suffering and shame
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best*

For the world of lost sinners was slain

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down
I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown
I know you desire to be desired you can be through Jesus*

*There is someone here tonight that desires to one again be desired be God
You are walking around with the guilt of the ages within you
And you need to get rid of it or you feel you will die*

*You may be a young man who has let down your parents by getting into trouble/
You desire to be trusted again*

*You may be a young girl who carries the guilt of not being as innocent as
Your parent may think/You desire to be daddy's little girl again*

*You may be a husband or wife that has mistreated your spouse and
You just desire for it to be like it used to be*

*Son/daughter and have not spoken to Mom/dad in years
But you desire for that relationship to work*

*You may just be a child of God who has made some mistakes
And you are constantly beating yourself up
You desire to be desired*

*You may have lost a loved one and you carry around the guilt of
Things that you wish you would have said or done in their lifetime
You desired to once again be right with yourself with your neighbor and with God*

Reclaiming Home Field Advantage

Psalm 73:2-3; 14-17

(NIV) (2) But as for me, my foot almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. (3) For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (14) All day long I have been plague; I have been punished every morning. (15) I had said, "I will speak thus" I would have betrayed your children. (16) When I tried to understand this it was oppressive to me. (17) Till I entered the sanctuary of the Lord; then I understood their final destiny.

(NLT) (2) But as for me, I came so close to the cliff! My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. (3) For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. (14) All I get is trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain. (15) If I had really spoken this way I would have been a traitor to your people. (16) So I tried to

understand why the wicked prosper. But it was too difficult. Then one day I went into your sanctuary O God, and thought about the destiny of the wicked.

(The Message) But I nearly missed it, missed seeing His goodness. I was looking the other way, looking up to the people at the top, envying the wicked who have it made, who have nothing to worry about, not a care in the whole wide world. (14) I have been stupid to play by the rules and what has it gotten me? A run of bad luck that's what a slap in the face every time I walk out of the door. If I'd have given in and talked like this I would have betrayed your children. Still then I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache... Until I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I saw the whole picture.

*In the world of sports not many things are more sought after than a Championship trophy
The goal of the season is to win the coveted award that says that you are the best
I mean it does not what sport you are talking about
Football players want to win the Super Bowl
Baseball players/World series
Basketball player/NBA Finals
Soccer People want to win the World Cup and Hockey folk/Stamley
People want to do their best to be the best*

*One very key factor or major determinant is having home field/home court advantage
This means that you play more games at home than you play away
This would mean that the Grizzlies would play more games at the Pyramid
Or in their new stadium than they would in other cities
Or the Redbirds would appear more times at AutoZone Park more times than elsewhere*

*The Tigers of the University of Memphis teams would don their home whites
More times a year than their away blues*

Being at home more than away is what it means to have home field or home court advantage

You're not with me yet

*Do you remember the fights that happened after school?
It would be about 3:00 or 3:30 depending when you got out of school
And there would usually be a bully and a scared little guy
The little guy would usually be crying out of sheer terror
While the big guy would be taunting him telling him all that he would do*

*As a result the little guy would start running and the bully would give chase
The boy would run all the way home
And the bully would follow
But something happened when the boy got home
His attitude would change and he would be ready to fight*

*There was something about being at home that was different than the school yard
 Something at home gave the boy the strength to stand up for himself
 I contend that the difference was him realizing that he had home field advantage
 There is security in being at home, there is comfort in being at home,
 The home crowd is cheering you on at home*

Needless to say it helps when you have home field advantage

*As we consider these two illustrations that reveal such an apparent behavioral change
 And it is becoming clear that the change is a result of the having home field advantage
 Let us quickly consider one more example that is safely nestled within the confines of this
 text*

*As we lift this text for our observation and investigation we immediately encounter
 The reminiscent writer Asaph who is remembering a time when
 His test was more pronounce than his testimony
 Asaph was the chief musician at the sanctuary of the Lord*

*Asaph was very skilled at what he did
 I mean he handled all music with both a sense of professionalism and musical integrity
 Above that he was downright anointed to lead people into the Presence of God*

*How do you know all of this Pastor
 Well there are two reasons
 First he was the Minister of Music for David, who was a musician
 When it comes to music it is hard to please fellow musicians
 Musicians only hired the best to work for them
 And we know David was a musician*

*The Bible says in I Samuel 16:23 That whenever the evil Spirit
 Came upon Saul that David would take his harp and play
 And Saul would get relief and the evil spirit would leave
 So the first reason that I know Asaph had to be good at what he did
 Is that he was hired to work for David who was a musician*

*The second reason and the main reason that I know he was anointed
 Is that the Bible says in I Chronicles 16:4-5 that David appointed
 Asaph to be the chief worship leader in the sanctuary, before the ark of the covenant
 Giving thanks and making petition*

*But here we encounter this anointed praise leader; this chief musician called of God and
 king
 This man with a multiplicity of gifts and one who dedicated
 To full-time and consecrated ministry
 And he begins by writing "But as for me my foot almost slipped" because he
 Began to "envy the wicked because they continue to prosper in spite of being wicked"*

*I mean he was raised in church the church/ Know about the goodness of God
 I know he was raised in church because
 The Bible says (I Chron. 15:23) that this was Asaph/ son of Berekiah an usher of the
 sanctuary
 But yet here he is saved sanctified and filled but ready to quit
 Because he is envious of the wicked*

*In fact there are eighteen reasons that this sanctified worship leader says that he envies
 The wicked:*

They have no struggles Healthy bodies Strong bodies Free from common
 burdens They are care free Not plague by human ills/ Wear pride as a
 necklace / Clothe themselves in violence/ From their mouths come iniquity / Evil mind
 know no limits / They scoff and speak with malice / In their arrogance they threaten
 oppression / Their mouths lay claim to heaven / Their tongues take possession of the Earth
 / People like them
 They drink waters of abundance / They always increase in wealth

I suggest when he started looking at the wicked he realized that somewhere

He had lost his home field advantage

*When he started to wonder about the success of others
 It was the first time that he noticed that he had lost the comforts of home
 The security of home was gone*

*Let me remind you that this writer is saved and anointed and called by God
 Appointed by the king to lead praise and worship at the very mouth of the Jerusalem
 Temple
 But now he finds himself hatin, no jealous, no envious of the wicked*

*Is this true can people that are saved find themselves envying the wicked
 I mean is it possible that people that are anointed could possibly want to quit
 Has anyone else ever been there
 Have you ever felt like Asaph*

*I mean it is not a matter whether you are saved or not/ You are; you gave your life to
 Christ
 You do your best to do your best to live for him
 But every once and a while the old man or woman creeps up and begins to ask questions
 Why do the wicked always seem to get ahead*

*I mean you are saved
 But you work hard everyday and pull to the light in the only car you can afford
 And see some drug dealer drive up next to you at the light*

With a \$50K truck sittin on \$10K (20-inch rims) and he ain't never worked a legal job in his life

Have you ever envied the wicked

*Or you are a sister that lives your life according to the very Word of God
And find yourself doing OK for you and your kids/ working all day and at school at night
But when you go shopping you to see what you can afford
You see the sister who you know spends her
Days sleep and her nights sliding up and down the pole at the strip club
Have you ever thought about why the wicked prosper*

*I mean you are a father have been on the job for years yet because the boss
Is under pressure from his boss to hire someone
Less qualified to be your supervisor
You ever been there*

*A professional woman who desires to be married and prays to have children
But try to present your body as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God
Yet you see these "loose" women that get married and have babies
And mistreat the man and the kids
Have you ever envied the wicked*

*You are a good young man looking for a nice young lady
But the only men they seem to want is a rough neck that will cuss them out
And cheat or beat on them/ or leave them with a child and no support
Have you wondered why the wicked prosper*

*Have you ever felt like Asaph
I mean it seems that no matter how much you do for the Lord
How many songs you lead, meetings you sit in, sermons you preach
People you pray for, sacrifices you make
It seems that the storms of life keep coming
And on top of that someone who is not even cognizant of God
Seems to be further than you are*

You ever felt like Asaph

*I mean Asaph was in bad shape and I contend that all of us have found ourselves here
There was no comfort for Asaph/ He was a long way from the feeling of home
He has realized that he somewhere lost home field advantage*

*It got so bad that Asaph said in verse 13 as if he was quoting from
The mental diary of some of our experiences
"Was it for nothing that I kept me heart pure; and kept myself from doing wrong"
"Am I stupid for playing by the rules"*

*I mean dirty money is better than no money
 You know a piece of somebody else's man
 Is better than not having a man*

*Some of us like Asaph in this text find ourselves ready to quit
 Like Asaph in the 16 verse understanding this was oppressive because it didn't make sense
 Put a thumbtack there I will be back to tell you why it didn't make sense
 To Asaph and even to us*

*It begins to become clear in verse 17
 He says until I stepped into the sanctuary of the Lord*

*There was something about the sanctuary of the Lord that felt like home
 There was something about the sanctuary that felt secure/that felt comfortable
 There was something that made it all make sense
 It was in the sanctuary that Asaph began to reclaim home field advantage*

*Isn't that true in our situation
 I don't care what kind of confusion that goes on during the week
 Isn't it good to step into the sanctuary of the Lord
 When you step into the sanctuary of the Lord*

*You get reassured that weepin may endure for a night but Joy cometh in the morning
 When you step in you will hear somebody say I'm so glad trouble don't last always
 In the sanctuary you will hear an old saint say I got a feeling everything gonna be alright*

Its in the sanctuary that we like Asaph we begin to reclaim home field advantage

But pastor why is that?

Well let us just walk through the sanctuary and see if we can't find out.

*Before we do the walk through we must first understand that
 The reason you went to the sanctuary was to see God
 There was no other reason to go
 You went to the house of the Lord to see
 You did not go to network to pass out cards
 You did not go to find a date
 You did not go to hear a certain preacher*

*But when you went to the sanctuary
 You went to see God manifest Himself in a new and exciting way*

*Secondly before you went to the sanctuary you had to prepare yourself
 You had to get rid of all the stuff*

*You could not tell the rich folk from the poor folk
 I mean you could not bring the influence of your check book to the sanctuary
 You were supposed to bring your tithe but the tithe was what you owed
 Not position yourself with influence*

*You would also have to be singing the scriptures and the prayers before you get there
 This would prepare you for worship
 See a lot of church folk today (not at MBCC) have a spectator spirit
 I showed up now entertain me
 But those who come to church to see God realize that worship is participation
 And as a result in order for me to get mine I might have to raise my hand
 I might have to shout Amen, I might have to say hallelujah*

*You were to also put on a robe / it was not a fashion show in the sanctuary
 This where Asaph and us begin to reclaim home field advantage*

When you walked in you entered the

Outer Court:

***Brazen Altar- Confession
 Laver- Wash in the Word***

Inner Court:

***Table of Shewbread- Prayer for petition and protection
 Golden Lampstand- Light of the anointing of god (Acts 2)***

Altar of Intercession- Prayer for other is easy when you have faith that your needs are met

Holy of Holies

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

*In order to reclaim home field advantage where ever you are
 You can have the sanctuary where ever you are
 All you have to do is get in to the Presence of God*

Story of the Boy

The Good and Pleasant Church
 Psalm 133:1-3

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity. For it is like precious oil being poured on the head that runs down to the beard, even Aaron's beard, that runs down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Mount Hermon descendeth on the mountains of Zion for there God commandeth the blessing even life evermore.

In Chicago there is a street called Halsted Avenue
 Like Poplar here in Memphis Halsted is a street that runs from
 One end of town to the other end of town
 One fall day in 1997 as my wife picked me up from the Moody Bible Institute
 We decided to drive home straight down Halsted to Park Forest
 This trip with traffic lights would take about 1:15 minutes
 We quickly noticed, there in Chicago as we noticed the first time we drove down Poplar
 That these streets bear witness to the changes in the neighborhoods

By this I mean these streets experiences each of the extremities of the economic spectrum
 They see both the good neighborhoods and the bad ones
 Both the upper class and the no class/ Neighborhoods that the people are faring well
 But also the neighborhoods where the people were on welfare

In a real sense we noticed that there are some addresses on both Halsted and Poplar
 That are in nice areas places where you would like to live
 However there are also some areas that both of these streets
 Bear witness to that you want to lock your car doors and roll your windows up
 Places where green grass has been replaced by /glass of broken beer bottles and crack
 pipes

Where the sweet melodies of the birds
 Have been muted by the menacing sounds of gun blasts and police sirens
 We noticed that in these neighborhoods where the people most often looked like us
 There were three constants: the currency exchange, the liquor store and the church

The currency exchange is a shrine to the economic impotency that is experienced by
 An overwhelming percentage of our people
 In this group you for the most part
 You will find people that are on federal assistance
 Or other brothers and sisters that simply do not have bank account
 So they will pay a percentage of their money to both cash their check
 As well as pay their bill while never creating a resource strategy
 In order to break the oft times generational cycle of economic impotency
 That has been and is plaguing the community
 This more times than not results in discouragement and depression

Not to worry though because in the same block you find the liquor store
 This place is a haven of rest for those who are downtrodden and for

A nominal fee one can obtain an elixir that will temporary change your
 Reality into a euphoric bliss that will only carry you for a moment
 And later crash you into a migraine in the morning, Sunday morning
 So its off to the third of our three constants found in the African American community
 The church: but which one?

It was on Halsted that fall day that my wife realized that
 There where so many churches in our community
 In fact we decided to play a game called "Name the church"
 She looked out of one side and I the other and tried to name all of the churches

We discovered that there is a lot that you can learn about a church by looking at the sign
 The sign of a church tells you the name, the pastor's name and the denomination
 And we saw them all/Long names / short names/ deep names/ not so deep names
 We saw A.M.E./AMEZ/CME/ Amer.Bpt/Ntl Bpt/Sthn Bpt/ FullGsplBpt/DOC
 Apostolic/Pentecostal/Holiness/COGIC
 The pastors were Revs/Elder/Bishops/Overseers and even Apostles

But in the whole 1:15 minute drive we did not see a good and pleasant church
 We saw Baptist and COGIC and DOC even Catholic
 But we did not see a good and pleasant church

The church has played a central role in the African American Church

Historically

- Power – economic, social and knowledge
- Preservation- It is only because of the church that black folk have made it
- Dr. Dwight Perry

Biblically and Theologically

- Bethesda (John 5) the Place of the Outpouring

Practically

- Where we would get our praise on
- Our deliverance, our breakthrough, our healing
- The slaves would say it like this "Up above my head I hear music in the air, there must be a God somewhere"
- Grand ma said it like this "Be not dismayed what e'er be tide God will take care of you
- Daddy said it like this I don't feel no ways tired
- But nowadays we say it like this No Weapon Formed against me

We get our shout on in church

But what I really want to concentrate on this evening is the fact that behind the shout
 In most churches there is oft times if not most times is a lack of unity

Be this I mean that behind the fan fair of festivity
And after the shouting shoes of Sunday have ceased

I contend that in most churches there is a lack of unity

I mean deacons meeting against preachers
Preachers meeting against the choir
Choir don't like the ushers
Ushers can't stand the elders
Elders hatin on the dance troupe

I am not talking about the love we show on Sunday and in certain meetings
But I am talking about the side conversations and the meetings before after the meeting

Lack of unity

I realize that there are many definition of the word unity
So please allow for the sake of unity to define unity

Unity: *an intentional and organized "oneness" that moves and flows in thought, spirit, love joy, hope, peace, vision, and worship.*

And David said "Behold how good and how pleasant.."

TEXT

*In our text the ruddy, sling-shot toting, giant killing, shepherding, minister of music
From Bethlehem, named David
Is writing and his heart is filled with joy
He is joyous because he is witnessing something that to this time in life
He had never seen before*

*He saw brothers and sisters dwelling together in unity
He had never seen that, because if you remember
His brothers were mad at him because he was anointed king
In fact the Bible says in I Samuel 17 that in the valley of Elah
When all of the Israelite army was scared of Goliath
That David was there just to take refreshments to his brothers
And his oldest brother Eliab said, I don't know why you came
All you gonna do is show off your anointing*

*In fact why don't you take your anointed self on home
If I had time I would tell you that sometimes when you have an
Anointing on you life it is not your enemies that give you problems
But sometimes it is the folk that you think are in your corner*

That probably should be in your corner that give you the grief

*That tear you down and dog you out
This is what David had experience, this is what David was used to
But he saw something different here and as a result
He found himself full of joy and writing about*

*David as you know who was a shepherd
Went on to defeat the loud mouth giant Goliath there in the Valley of Elah
In fact in the GIV he said to Goliath
You better Go-lieth down*

*He later became the Minister of Music for Saul
And finally he became half King
He became the King of Judah
While Ishbosheth was the King of Israel*

*This sort of divided the Kingdom
There were people in the Northern Kingdom not getting along with
The Southern kingdom
People that are related and that used to get along
That are now not speaking to one another*

*I mean you had ushers and choir member giving each other dirty looks
I mean you had spiritual officers not vibing with the preachers
There was not unity*

*But in the 4th and 5th chapters of II Samuel Ishbosheth was murdered and Israel
Asked David to be the King
David became the King and there was a celebration*

*This meant that the kingdom was unified/The country was unified
The worship of God was once again unified
Brothers and sisters were unified
It was time for celebration and they were celebrating*

*When David saw all of this and all that was going on
When David saw people praising God for God's power and for the King
When David saw people praising God for David
David's heart was filled with joy and I can see hem*

*Looking out of the palace and reaching into his vestment and grabbing his
Pen to write Behold how good...*

Three things I see in the text and I will be through:

I. AN APPEARANCE TO BEHOLD

- *It's something to look at/Something to see*
- *When things are going well "You look blessed"*
- *Family/job*
- *Church-you can tell how things are going by the enthusiasm in the members and/or staff's response*
- *WOW*
- *We have lost the sense of wonder/ I contend that it is because we have lost unity*

II. AN ANOINTING TO BE APART OF

- *Notice the use of a simile/ Like precious oil/as the dew of Mt. Hermon*
- *Like anointing/the pouring of precious oil on the head that runs to beard*
- *Even Aaron's Beard? /Aaron's head must have been/Aaron's beard*
- *Sweet cinnamon, myrrh and calamus*
- *You remember who Aaron was*
- *Moses' brother/He was chosen of God to be the high priest*
- *As the high priest he made intercession for the people*
- *While other Levites were sprinkled*
- *He was anointed fully until he was covered in oil*
- *The Bible said that the oil ran on the entire skirts of his garments*
- *We do not have Levites but we do have one that stand in the place of the Levite that is the Pastor*
- *So if I may stretch the text a little I believe that unity is like unto the anointing that is poured onto the pastor's head that runs to the beard*
- *That runs to the skirts of the garments*
- *What I am suggesting is that God sends anointing where ever he sees unity*
- *All through the Bible God moved/One accord*
- *In fact the Bible says in Acts 2:1 that when the disciples were all together on one accord and in the same place that the Spirit showed up*
- *Somebody knows that an anointing is the symbol of the Holy Spirit*
- *But it goes even further than that*

- *Because Jesus says that after the spirit comes upon you, you shall have power*
- *We are wondering why we don't have power/are we anointed*
- *Are we on one accord*
- *God does something special when people are on one accord*
- *Many of us miss it because there is no unity*
- *See many of us think that in church you must always agree*
- *That is literally impossible/where you have more than one person you will not always have agreement*
- *Married people/tow but they do not always agree/if they do someone lying*
- *But the trick of unity is to disagree without ever having discord*
- *God does something when he sees people on one accord*
- *I contend that the text suggests that when God sees unity he anoint the head and then it runs to the body*
- *He anoints the head of Aaron/High Priest*
- *I don't agree but I recognize your anointing/ so I will line up until I see what you see*
- *I don't think it is fair for the pastor to be the only one anointed*
- *Skirts of the garments/ just line and even when you don't agree a drip will fall on you-Bible class/spiritual officer meeting/ choir rehearsal*

III. ADDRESS OF THE BLESSING

- *For there God commandeth the blessing*
- *Address/System of mail/address*
- *E-mail address/God's know where we are*
- *There is the blessing*
- *But have you noticed that there is not here*
- *God blesses where he sees anointing*
- *He anoints where he see unity*

No More Excuses**Psalm 150:6**

⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!

This text is the final entry in the book of Psalms
 As you know from your weekly Psalm letters
 Psalm is made up of 5 different books
 And 150 chapters
 There are many different things discussed in the Psalms
 But for some reason the final Psalms deals with worship and praise

We could have concluded with being a tree part two
 But God by His Spirit moved the compilers to put Psalm 150 as the last
 A Psalm that discusses praise and worship
 A Psalm that breaks down the worship and praise of God like no other
 A Psalm that is only six verses long but is pregnant with praise
 And filled prophetic purpose
 A Psalm that I contend leaves us with no excuses
 Well let me begin to put this thing together so that the shout will make sense later

I heard somewhere that
 Excuses are tools of incompetence
 The build monuments of nothingness
 Those that use them are seldom good for anything

I contend that in church that excuses are used most often in the area of worship and praise
 Worship and praise are so important to this book that the writer saved it for last

In fact in my study one commentator said that the whole of the book of Psalms
 Can be summed up in the sixth verse of this 150 Psalm
 It says let everything that hath breath praise the Lord
 He says that the whole book from the first to the last deals with

The Praise and worship of God
 However it is my contention that when it comes to true praise
 And when it comes to real worship
 More times than not we offer excuses

You know what I am talking about excuses like

It don't take all of that
 I ain't running and jumping like a fool
 Girl I just got my hair did
 I would praise but I'm holding the baby
 I mean real men don't be crying and worshiping, not real men
 I'm tired man, you don't know-I work

And if we don't offer excuses we offer a praise look alike that is not even pleasing
To the nostrils of God

I mean look at what the church is becoming
It used to be a place where worship took place where breakthroughs happened
But now it has in many cases been reduced to a TV show with staged tricks
And churches that are not on TV
More times than not are trying to do what these churches are doing to be popular
Because the more popular you are the more people come
The more people come the more money you raise

The more money you raise the more successful you are right?
Isn't that what God wants us to be successful and rich
That's what Creflo and the "Money Cometh to me now" man wants us to believe

But I have to say in the words of Jeremiah Wright
That money only cometh after a job-eth cometh
And then you can take your paycheck-eth to the bank-eth

Our worship has begun to stink in God's nostrils
But that is if we give worship because more times than not we offer excuses

I kind of started this with the men on Monday night in our class
And we deduced that an excuse is the satellite issue of a deeper reason and/or issue
We discovered that oft times excuses are used to cover up the real reasons

As a result the excuses that are used about worship
Are probably covering
Some deeper issues

Could one such issue be that you feel guilty because of unconfessed sin
Could one such issue be you don't feel worthy?
Could one such reason be that sometimes I doubt if God is real
Could it be that sometimes your questions about God are so big?
That your faith about Him seems too small

What has been your excuse?

I just want challenge you tonight to say no more excuses
Let us tiptoe to the truths that I believe tonight's text is tailored to teach
And I will be out of your way
There are three things that the text gives us that will take all of our excuses
Instructions, Instruments and Inspiration

Due to the instructions I believe this text answers all of the questions and as a result
We are left with no more excuses

I. INSTRUCTIONS

Verse 1:

Praise the Lord Praise God in his sanctuary Praise him in the firmament of His power

The first question that is answered is what to do and the second question is where to do it

What?

- Praise

Who?

- Notice the difference between the use of the Lord and then the use of God-One says praise The self existent creator God who is ruler over all
- The second says praise the great God who is in covenant with mankind-Both are here
- This means praise the God who is Transcendent so holy we cannot touch Him
- But also praise God who is so Immanent loving that He cares about all that goes on in my life
- Praise God as the old folks used to say that is big enough to rule the universe but small enough to fit in my heart

Where?

- In the sanctuary/The temple in Jerusalem/ the sanctuary of the Lord/the sanctuary of the MBCC
- Worship is done in his presence/In the Holy of Holies
- But as we talked about before you cannot worship Him in His presence with flesh
- That's why all of the confession was needed
- You must worship Him in spirit/John 4:23
- That means in here we should come to spectate/but to participate
- I know what I have come for and it does not matter if I have to do it all by myself but I am gonna do it/ Because certain things are just done certain places
- If I go to AutoZone I expect to find a game/Library –reading
- A Club-drinking and dancing-But when I come to the sanctuary
- Firmament of his power or his mighty firmament
- Means either that the angels in the heavens praise Him or that there should be praise anywhere under heaven
- The praise is so loud that the sky is filled with this praise
- Taste of Chicago/Petrillo Band Shell/John P. Kee
- There should be praise in the firmament

*Why?**Verse 2: For His mighty acts and for His excellent greatness*

- This why we praise him
 - Because he has done something for us
 - I believe that if I had time to pass the mike around right now
 - That some one would be able to testify that God has done something
 - If he ever healed you that is a praise
 - If he ever provided for you that is a praise/car/job/health/strength/mind/family/church
 - Protected you when you know you were wrong/Clubs/sex/death angel/dangers seen and unseen/children/ambulance did not stop at your door
 - If he woke you up this morning and you were not outside
 - If you knew where you were and could see/Even if you didn't like what you saw
 - If you heard anything
 - If you were able to swing your own legs out of the bed
 - And wash yourself up this morning
 - If you could choose what you wanted to where
 - These are his mighty acts
-
- But also praise Him for his excellent great
 - He is greatly great/excellently excellent/perfectly perfect and completely completely
 - This is the one we do not do this is praise for who God is
 - This is if he does not do anything else
 - He still is God
 - Hebrews boys type of worship
 - He is the author and finisher
 - He is the only one who know the mixture of the clouds
 - He is the only one that is the father of the rain
 - He is the one who knows how many grains of sand are on the beach
 - He is excellently great

II. INSTRUMENTS*How?*

Psalm 150:3-5 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp!

⁴Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!

⁵Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

- There are many instrument named and I derive two meanings out of this
- Number one is that the worship of God and the Praise of His most high name is suppose to be the best that it can possibly be
- It does take all of that
- One is to pull out all of the stops for worship
- One is not supposed to skimp and cut corners but on is to use all that they can to give praise to God
- When I give God praise I do not do half-way
- I didn't drink and party half way
- I don't half way my job/especially nowadays
- I will not skimp on God
- The second meaning is a little deeper because it deals with the gifts that are used.
- All of these instrumentalists are gifted and skilled to play their instrument
- But the symphony only happens when they play together
- It sounds good as a solo but Oh what would happen if that thing came together with the whole band
- There are some people here with a solo mentality
- But oh I dare you to realize that all of our gifts are good individually
- But what do you think will happen to this church and this city when we decide to pool our gift resources together
- How many more thousands could we bless if we would use our gifts
- I am not talking about what you are doing
- But I am talking about your gift
- I believe that there are a lot of people who serve in church outside of there gift
- You mean to tell me that there are only 7-8 people in this church with the gift of preaching and pastoring
- You mean there is only one person with the gift of music
- There probably is someone sitting in here that is hiding or sitting on a gift that God has given them

III. INSPIRATION

Verse 6: Let everything that have breath praise the Lord.

- This solidifies our purpose on earth
- We are created to worship

- But it also signifies that fact that the whole of the universe is to offer praises to Him
- There is no acceptable excuse not praise Him

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